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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a collection of articles addressing current issues in early childhood education. The first article, "Would You Like to Pack Away Now?: Improving the Quality of Talk in Early Childhood Programs," (Laurie Makin) addresses how teachers talk to children. The second article, "Persistence When It's Difficult: A Disposition to Learn for Early Childhood," (Margaret Carr) addresses learning attributes for 4-year-olds. The third article, "Emergent Literacy in Kindergartens," (Claire J. McLachan-Smith and Alison St. George) examines literacy readiness. The fourth article, "Quality Childcare: Do Parents Choose It?" (Anne B. Smith and Shanee I. Barraclough) addresses parental choice of child care. The fifth article, "The Technical Language Children Use at Home," (Marilyn Fleer) examines technology education. The sixth article, "Anau Ako Pasifika: A Home-Based Early Childhood Project for Pacific Islands Families in Aotearoa/New Zealand," (Diane Mara) describes a program that enhances children's language. The seventh article, "Good Practice to Best Practice: Extending Policies and Children's Minds," (Anne Meade) describes the positive changes in early childhood education policy in New Zealand in the late 1980s. The eighth article, "Te Kohanga Reo: More than a Language Nest," (Arapera Royal Tangaere) describes the Maori movement. The ninth article, "Ethical Quandaries for Neophyte Early Childhood Practitioners," (Kennece coombe and Linda Newman) addresses professional ethics in early childhood teacher education. The tenth article, "Factors Impacting on Children's Adjustment to the First Year of School," (Kay Margetts) addresses children's adjustment to school. (SD)

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A Collection of Recent Research

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Comment

Valerie Podmore

New Zealand Council for Educational Research

What are the current important topics and issues in early childhood education? Anne Meade interweaves a wide range of them in the opening article of the policy and practice issues section of this new *Early Childhood Folio 3*. Policy issues are concerned with: funding and support of early childhood education, chartering, licensing, developing curriculum guidelines, and ensuring appropriate and adequately resourced early childhood services for Maori people (a Treaty of Waitangi responsibility). Good practice initiatives also include codes of ethics, quality assurance systems, training and qualifications, and reflective practice which is influenced by the findings of scholars. Research on several of these topics is explored in this Folio. In her article, another major keynote address, Arapera Royal Tangaere raises important policy issues related to the kohanga reo movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It is interesting historically to note that the lead article in *Early Childhood Folio 2*, published in 1986, was on Jean Piaget. A number of articles in *Early Childhood Folio 3* show the influence of Vygotsky and some mention Bruner. Teachers and parents will find useful research-based information about extending children's thinking and children's language and literacy experiences in this new collection. Underlying all of the articles are the ideas or research findings of scholars. These ideas can enhance practice.

Curriculum guidelines are a current topic, with the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand. In *Te kōhanga reo: More than a language nest*, Arapera Royal Tangaere describes how the strands and goals of *Te Whāriki* are not new to Maori. "Exploration—Mana aotūroa", a strand of *Te Whāriki*, underpins Anne Meade's discussion of children's development of schemas in *Good practice to best practice: Extending policies and children's minds*. The article by Margaret Carr, *Persistence when it's difficult: A disposition to learn for early childhood*, shows a holistic connection with the five strands listed in *Te Whāriki:* well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration. A recent Weaving Webs conference held in Melbourne demonstrated a trans-Tasman emphasis on early childhood curriculum, and included New Zealand papers on te whariki, the early childhood curriculum. Ongoing research projects on te whariki are currently underway in New Zealand, including one on assessment (by Margaret Carr) and one on evaluation (jointly co-ordinated by Helen May and Valerie Podmore, with Diane Mara).

Policies which promote quality assurance are topical in New Zealand and Australia. Research from a range of countries continues to show how the quality of early childhood education influences the outcomes for children. The article by Anne Smith and Shanee Barraclough, *Quality childcare: Do parents choose it?*, explains why policy makers need to look beyond parental choice to ensure that high quality early childhood services are provided. The processes contributing to quality include the type of interactions that take place between adults and children. Work by Laurie Makin in Australia, *"Would you like to pack away now?": Improving the quality of talk in early childhood programs*, suggests how to improve the quality of interactions in early childhood centres.

All of the papers in this new collection are based on New Zealand and Australian research. The selected articles address some of the important current topics in early childhood education. They also point practitioners, parents, and researchers to further early childhood projects and publications.

VALERIE PODMORE is a senior researcher and research group leader of the early childhood research group at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

International research which shows how the quality of early childhood education influences the outcomes for children is found in:

Ochiltree, G. (1994). *Effects of care on young children: Forty years of research.* AIFS Early Childhood Study Paper No. 5. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Podmore, V. N. (1993). *Education and care: A review of international studies of the outcomes of early childhood experiences.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research/Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Podmore, V. N. (1994). *Early childhood education and care: A summary review of the outcomes of inadequate provision.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research/ Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Wylie, C. (1994). *What research on early childhood education/care outcomes can, and can't tell policymakers.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

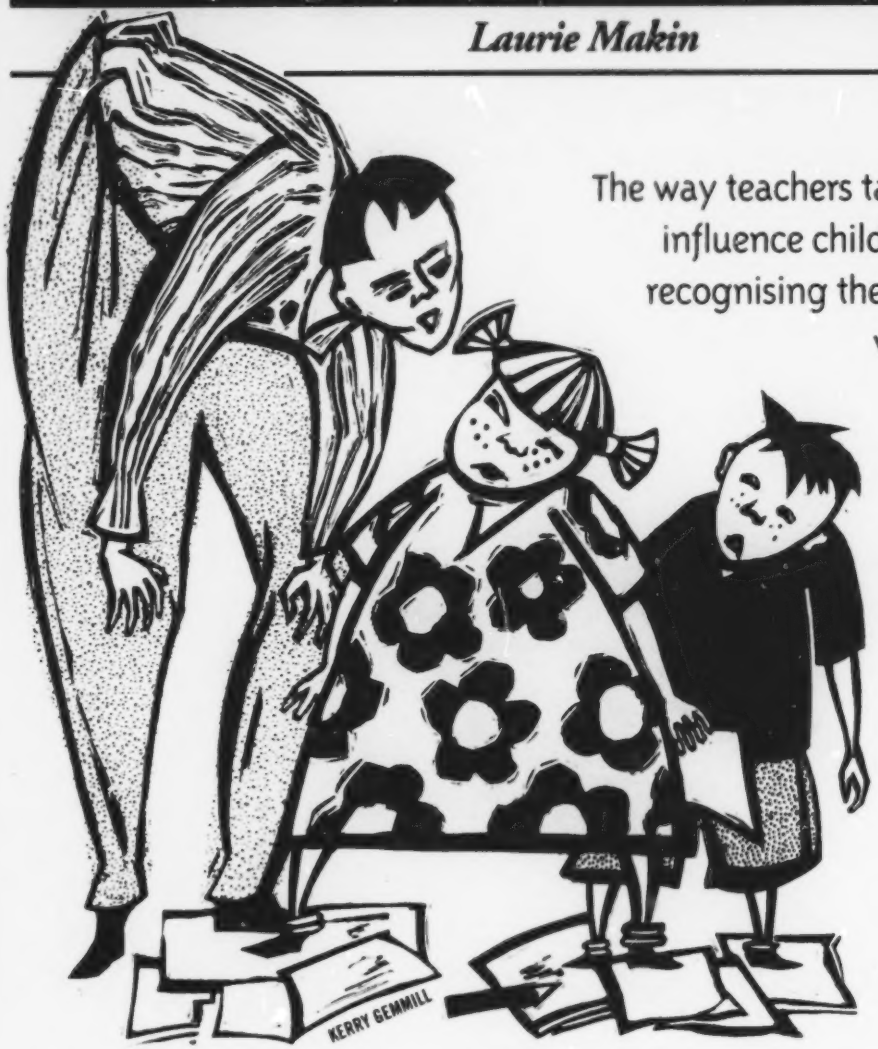
The New Zealand early childhood curriculum document is:

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki mataurang mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early childhood curriculum.* Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.

"Would you like to pack away now?"

Improving the quality of talk in early childhood programs

Laurie Makin



The way teachers talk to children can influence children's learning. By recognising their own patterns of verbal interaction, teachers can improve the quality of these interactions, and thus enhance the children's learning.

Introduction

In many areas of society today there is increased emphasis on accountability and on quality. Education is no exception. Australia has developed a system of accrediting childcare centres which has as its goal improving the quality of services offered to children and families. Of the 52 guiding principles set out for staff, the first 15 focus on quality interactions between staff, parents, and children. The core principles (that is, those in which "good quality" is mandatory for accreditation) are:

- Staff interactions with children are warm and friendly.
- Staff treat all children equally and try to accommodate their individual needs: they respect diversity of background.
- Staff treat all children equally and try to accommodate their individual needs: they treat both sexes without bias.
- Staff use a positive approach in guidance and discipline.

- There is verbal and written communication with all families about the centre.
- There is active interchange between parents and staff.
- Staff communicate well with each other.

These are general principles which, to form part of an accreditation process, need to be translated into quality practices. However, quality is difficult to measure. How do general principles on quality interaction translate, for example, into verbal exchanges?

Based on research projects undertaken in four childcare centres and with four Year 1 classes, this article looks at features of the verbal exchanges between teachers and children in early childhood educational programs, and suggests a way in which teachers can develop a clear picture of their own individual interaction patterns by using semantic networks.

Semantic networks

One way of building a picture of what happens when people talk with each other is to use semantic networks. Language is a set of options which are often mutually exclusive (for example, *offering* information versus *requesting* information). Semantic networks set out frameworks for the series of options which are available within the English language. Normally, these options are chosen unconsciously. Habitual patterns of choice are developed which are not reflected upon in terms of their function. However, if change is to result, early childhood staff need a way of recognising the options which exist and then of identifying their individual habitual patterns in order to identify ways of improving their interaction patterns.

Teacher-child talk influences children's learning. Increased awareness of this influence—how it operates and what its effects may be—can lead to conscious adaptation of some aspects of individual interaction style. Teachers are of central importance in the formal educational process, particularly in the early years of education. Through using semantic networks, teachers can identify habitual aspects of their interaction style and hence identify areas for change. Identification of areas for change can be the first step in improving interaction quality.

The network presented in this article is a command network (*see* Figure 1).

Features of quality talk

Before looking at how quality teacher-child talk was measured in this research, it is interesting to note the main features of high quality interaction which have been identified in other studies of adult-child talk over the past twenty years. These include:

- Planned provision for development of children's competence to use language for a wide range of functions, oral and written.
- Talk which is appropriate in terms of children's backgrounds, their development, their interests, and the social situation.
- Effective scaffolding, so that adult talk is matched with a child's talk in terms of complexity of language level and ideas, with adults listening attentively and sensitively to understand a child's meaning, then developing and extending that meaning.
- A balance in verbal interactions, with children as well as adults initiating interactions and engaging in extended turns with a joint construction and negotiation of shared meaning—conversation, not interrogation.

Often overlooked in discussion of quality talk is the important underlying assumption that there is a match between the language(s) spoken by children and that spoken by the teacher. If this is not the case, special consideration must be given to issues such as whether the process of education will be a subtractive one in which a child's home language is replaced by English or whether education will assist the child to become bilingual.

Quality versus reality

Much research into teacher-child verbal exchanges has been carried out in upper primary classrooms, generally focusing on whole class activities. We know less about exchanges in childcare centres and in lower primary classrooms. A summary of features of typical classroom talk in primary classrooms, as supported by a number of research studies, is as follows:

- Child-initiated sequences are rare.
- Turns are very disparate with teacher talk dominating up to 70 percent.
- In a 45-minute period, the amount of time left for a class of 30 to contribute is an average of 20 seconds per pupil.
- Questions are primarily low level, requiring recall of factual information. They are the province of the teacher and are usually "display" questions, in other words, they ask children to display knowledge already known to the teacher (*What is that shape called?*). Students tend to respond with one word or one sentence answers.

A different picture might be expected to emerge from research carried out in childcare centres, considering the higher adult-child ratio, the smaller group sizes, and a child-centred philosophy. Yet a number of studies have found many limitations in verbal interaction in early childhood programs, for example:

- Little use of language for reasoning, predicting, or problem solving.
- Less varied conversation than in the home.
- Little sense of intellectual struggle and of true communication.
- Lowered expectations of children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Lowered expectations of children whose home language backgrounds are languages other than English.

Mapping quality talk

If we are to improve the quality of teacher-child talk, we must first know what is actually happening. To do this, naturalistic data must be collected, coded, and analysed—not an easy task for a researcher. Teachers differ as do children. Curriculum content differs. The socio-economic backgrounds of the children differ as do their language backgrounds, their gender, their place within the family, their out-of-school experiences, their moods, and the group dynamics. The presence of an investigator inevitably affects naturalistic talk, especially if microphones or video cameras intrude on the scene. It is therefore important to find appropriate analytical tools which will reveal as objectively as possible, and in fine detail, comparable levels of quality. One such tool is semantic networks.

Theoretical background to the research projects

In order to carry out the investigations, insights from two theoretical perspectives were combined: systemic functional linguistics and role theory. Features of Hasan's message semantics network (1983) were selected and modified in order to produce five semantic networks which paralleled leadership criteria as described by Lewin, Lippitt & White (1939), (*see* Figure 2). The five networks were used as interpretative tools to place the teachers along a continuum of *more democratic* to *more authoritarian*. Some of the characteristic features of the democratic style echo Rogoff's description (1990) of effective scaffolding, in particular, involving children in setting goals, helping them see why they are doing something (the overall purpose), and how different activity steps along the way contribute to the overall goal, and giving the children increasing responsibility as they become able to handle it.

Semantic networks were used in the research in order to identify some of the features which realise different teacher leadership styles.

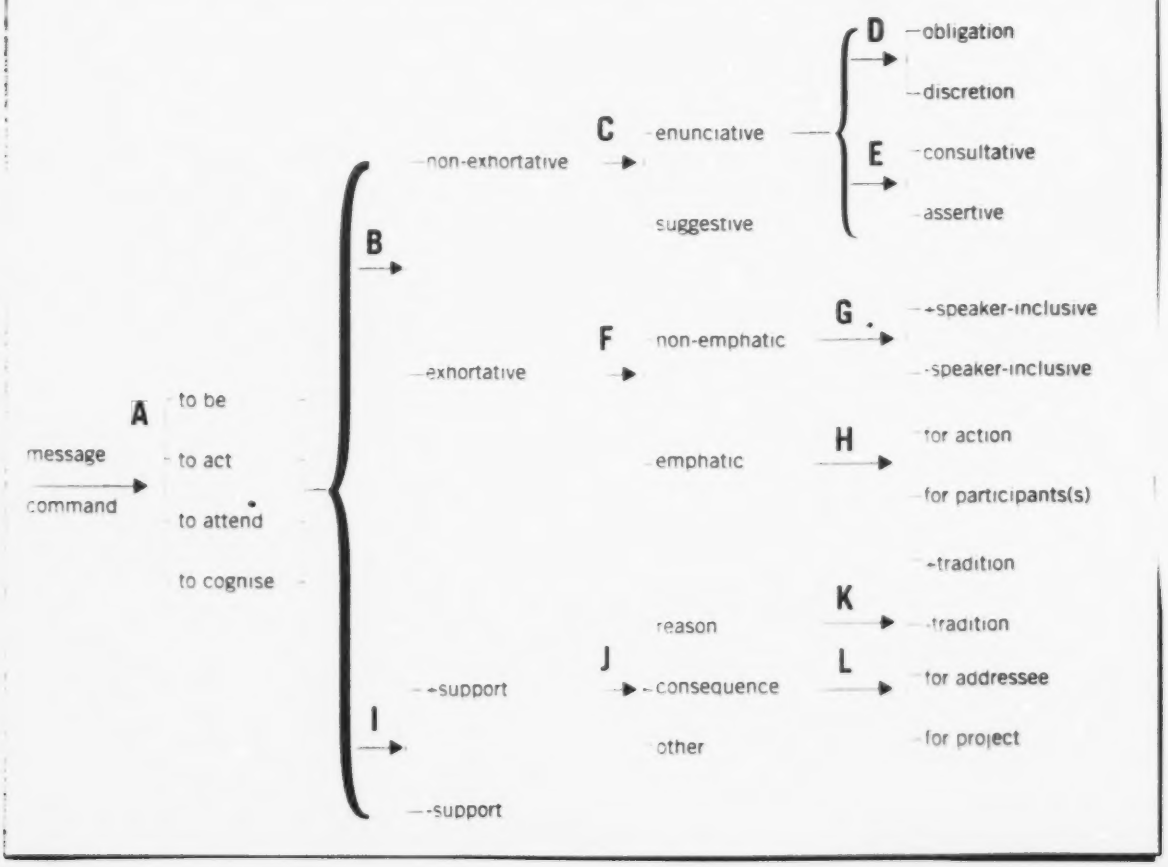
Certain semantic characterisations were seen as of central importance in differentiating teacher-interaction styles:

- The type of questions asked, in particular whether these included opinion-seeking and explanation-seeking questions.
- The use of positive and negative evaluative comments and the offering of support for evaluation, that is, whether children were given supporting information which helped them understand why they were being evaluated in a particular way.
- The types of commands to which the children were exposed, in particular whether children were commanded to cognise (for example, think, decide, remember). As with evaluative commands, there were differences in the offering of supporting information for commands.
- The offers of global information, that is "big picture" information versus offers of step-by-step information (*see* Figure 2).

A semantic network for commands

One of the five semantic networks used focused on commands (*see* Figure 1). This network allows a comparison of different types of commands relating to task facilitation. At the first level of the network (Level A), classroom participants (both teacher and child) can be commanded *to be* (for example, *be a good boy*), *to act* (for example, *go and get it*), *to attend* (for example, *look at this one*), or *to cognise* (for example, *now you have to decide*). At this level, it is possible to gain an initial idea as to whether there is an orientation within the classroom to being thoughtful and reflective, or whether the

FIGURE 1
COMMAND NETWORK ADAPTED FROM HASAN (1983)



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emphasis is on other areas, such as behaviour management. The distinction between the command *to act* and the command *to cognise* is particularly important in this regard. The educational context might lead one to expect a strong representation of "cognise" commands. However, this expectation was not fulfilled in either the school or childcare centre data.

Level B of the command network offers a way of differentiating between *non-exhortative* and *exhortative* [urging or insisting] commands. In general, *non-exhortative* commands are realised by *interrogatives* (*Will you start packing away now please?*). Less commonly they are realised by *statements*, often prefaced and/or modalised (*I think we might start to pack away now*). *Exhortative* commands are realised most commonly by *imperatives* (*Pack away now, children*). This distinction between *exhortative* and *non-exhortative* introduces the possibility of the presence or absence of *addressee* negotiation power. The presence of such freedom or lack of freedom can, of course, be illusory. Teachers, perhaps unfairly, are often accused of overuse of a falsely democratic mode of expression which suggests more freedom than may be found to exist if a child actually takes it at face value. The *Would you like to put away your books now and come and sit on the mat?* type of command is not normally expected to be answered by a *No, I'd rather finish what I'm doing* response. Reflection on one's habitual use of *non-exhortative* and *exhortative* commands provides insight into the degree of negotiation existing in the interaction. It might be expected that in a more democratically-led classroom, *non-exhortative* commands will be more common than *exhortative* commands.

If children are to learn to be learners and to develop a problem-solving orientation to learning, it would seem useful for teachers to ensure that cognitive activity is expected and valued.

Non-exhortative commands (*see* Level C) can be either *enunciative* [expressed definitely] or *suggestive*. *Enunciative* commands may in turn differ as to whether they suggest *obligation* or allow *discretion*, and as to whether they are *consultative* or *assertive*.

Suggestive commands (*Let's get dressed now*) blur the boundary between *co-operation* and *demand* as the teacher includes him or herself within the scope of the command without this actually being the case. Hasan (1988) suggests that:

> selection of this feature is conducive to the suppression of distinctions between authority and benefaction, between command and offer, between coercion and cooperation.

Speaker-inclusion in *suggestive* commands such as *Let's get dressed* does not represent intended duality of action. *Speaker-inclusion* in *exhortative* commands, such as *Let's put away the blocks* does, however, represent an offer of assistance. This distinction is seen as being one way to indicate if the leader acts as a group member (*see* Figure 2 for the key features of leadership style). The more democratic situation of a teacher including him or herself as part of the group would seem more likely to be conveyed through *speaker-inclusive* emphasis.

The other divisions in the command network relate to whether or not commands are supported by *reasons*, by *consequences*, either for the addressee(s) or for the *project*, or by *other information* which may give the *addressees* insight into the impetus behind a command.

The research projects

The projects involved teachers and children in four Year 1 classrooms (six-year-olds) and in four childcare centres (the four-year-olds only). Data were collected during small-group activities for a minimum of four hours. Interactions were audiotaped, transcribed, and divided into "messages" which are more or less equivalent to clauses. The messages were analysed using as interpretative tools five semantic networks, one of which was the command network discussed in this paper.

A number of interesting features emerged. In the Year 1 classrooms two of the four teachers chose the option *command* very frequently. If researchers were to use only the framework of Lewin et al., these would be identified as demonstrating an authoritarian style. Yet, there was an important difference in how the command option was realised. One of the teachers chose commands in over one-third of messages. Commands were mainly *exhortative* commands to act. This teacher's commands were the least often supported of the commands of the four. This teacher appeared, upon analysis of commands, to be the most *authoritarian* in approach.

The other teacher chose commands almost half of the time (that is, even more frequently). However, she also showed the widest range of commands, with *cognise* being a frequent choice, something which differentiated her from the other teachers. She ranked high in terms of both *non-exhortative* commands and *supported* commands. She frequently exhorted children to *think, decide, choose, vote, consider*. This teacher demonstrated what was named the *predominant* style. It shares some features of the *authoritarian* style, including a high incidence of commands. However, the type of command led children towards becoming empowered learners. This teacher's aim was a more democratic classroom. If children are to learn to be learners and to develop a problem-solving orientation to learning, it would seem useful for teachers to ensure that cognitive activity is expected and valued. This is an important part of quality interaction.

Data from the childcare centres also showed differences in teacher style. This data was collected during small-group art activities with four-year-olds. Even in this type of activity, some of the features identified as common in primary school data were also evident in the childcare setting—teacher domination of talk in general; teacher domination of questions; few opinion-seeking questions. It was common in both primary and childcare settings for questions not to be answered because teachers continue to speak, therefore not offering children the opportunity of responding.

There was, in both the primary and the childcare settings, teacher domination of commands, with few instances of supporting information. The teachers in the childcare centres chose the command options considerably less frequently than did the Year 1 teachers. There was a higher incidence of non-exhortative

commands which offer more room for negotiation. However, very few commands (four percent) were supported with information which might help children understand why they are commanded to engage in certain behaviours or activities.

Discussion

Salient questions for teachers who want to reflect upon their current practice are:

- When children are commanded to do something, are they expected: *to be, to act, to attend*, or *to cognise*?
- Are passivity and obedience, or thoughtfulness and decision making more likely to be encouraged if one type of command dominates or is rarely used?
- Are commands absolute, or do they offer room for negotiation?
- Is negotiation encouraged?
- Are commands specific to the immediate context only, or is insight offered through supporting information as to how what is to be done fits within a wider perspective?
- Does the teacher identify him or herself as a group member?

Conclusion

To improve the quality of verbal interaction between staff and children in childcare centres, interpretative tools are needed which help map clearly what is happening and which give teachers objective feedback on their habitual interaction patterns.

The small group may simply be the large group writ small (that is, with more similar than dissimilar features of classroom discourse in evidence). In all eight settings which were studied, the transmission model was evident even in small-group interactions.

Semantic networks set out very clearly ranges of options open to speakers. They can be as detailed as is required and can yield a clear description of habitual semantic choices. In this way, profiles of teacher-child interaction styles can be developed. Another benefit arises from the fact that when teacher-child talk is investigated it may be useful to record not only the presence of certain features in the discourse of teachers and children, but also the fact that there are options available in verbal interaction which are not usually taken up by teachers or by children. Such omission may be equally meaningful. Absence of choice cannot be subjected to statistical procedures. One of the strengths of semantic networks as interpretative tools is their ability to reveal clearly what is not happening as well as what is happening.

Semantic networks can give insight into how talk in education contributes to the joint construction of knowledge and can give individuals and groups insight into their habitual semantic choices. This can help us move beyond generalised motherhood statements to improve specific features of quality talk in early childhood programs.

FIGURE 2

LEADERSHIP CRITERIA

as described by Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939:273

Authoritarian	*Democratic*	*Laissez-faire*
1. All determination of policy by the leader.	1. All policies a matter of group discussion and decision, encouraged and assisted by the leaders.	1. Complete freedom for group or individual decision, without any leader participation.
2. Techniques and activity steps dictated by the authority, one at a time, so that future steps were always uncertain to a large degree.	2. Activity perspective gained during first discussion period. General steps to group goal sketched, and where technical advice was needed the leader suggested two or three alternative procedures from which choice could be made.	2. Various materials supplied by the leader, who made it clear that he would supply information when asked. He took no other part in group discussion.
3. The leader usually dictated the particular work task and work companions of each member.	3. The members were free to work with whomever they chose, and the division of tasks was left up to the group.	3. Complete non-participation by leader.
4. The dominator was "personal" in his praise and criticism of the work or each member, but remained aloof from active group participation except when demonstrating. He was friendly or impersonal rather than openly hostile.	4. The leader was "objective" or "fact minded" in his praise and criticism, and tried to be a regular group member in spirit without doing too much of the work.	4. Very infrequent comments on member activities unless questioned, and no attempt to participate or interfere with the course of events.

NOTES

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This article, printed with the kind permission of the publishers, is an edited version of:

Makin, L. (1996). Quality talk in early childhood programs. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, 1*, 100–109.

The guiding principles for staff in Australian childcare centres are detailed in:

National Childcare Accreditation Council. (1993). *Putting children first: Quality improvement and accreditation system handbook*. Sydney: Author.

Details of the two research projects on which the article is based can be found in:

Makin, L. (1994). *Teacher style and small group problem solving in multilingual classrooms: Roles and realisations*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Makin, L., White, M. & Owen, M. (1966). Creation or constraint: Anglo-Australian and Asian-Australian teacher responses to children's art-making. *Studies in Art Education, 37*(4) 226–244.

The theoretical perspectives used in the research were taken from:

Halliday, M. (1975). *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.

Lewin, K., Lippitt, R. & White, R. (1939). Patterns of aggressive behaviour in experimentally created "social climates". *The Journal of Social Psychology SPSSI Bulletin, 10*, 271–299.

The semantic network used in this research was based on:

Hasan, R. (1983). *A semantic network for the analysis of messages in everyday talk between mothers and children*. (Unpublished mimeo). Macquarie University, Sydney.

For Rogoff's description of effective scaffolding see:

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Other articles which use semantic networks include:

Hasan, R. (1988). Language in the process of socialisation: Home and school. In L. Gerot, J. Oldenburg & T. Van Leeuwen (Eds.), *Language and socialisation: Home and school. Proceedings from the Working Conference on Language in Education, 1986*. Sydney: Macquarie University.

Makin, L. (1996). Is the salad sandwich blue?: Teacher questions and children's learning. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 21*(4), 1–5.

Makin, White & Owen (1996), *see* above.

Other studies which explore adult-child talk include:

Barnes, D. (1976). *From communication to curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Bernstein, B. (1975). *Class, codes and control, volume 3: Towards a theory of educational transmissions*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bullock, A. (1975). *A language for life*. London: HMSO.

Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books.

Christie, F. (1988). The construction of knowledge in the junior primary school. In L. Gerot, J. Oldenburg, & T. Van Leeuwen (Eds.), *Language and socialisation: Home and school*. Proceedings from the working conference on language and education, 1986. Sydney: Macquarie University.

Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons: Social organisation in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Perrott, C. (1988). *Classroom talk and pupil learning: Guidelines for educators*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Reid, J., Forrestal, P. & Cook, J. (1989). *Small group learning in the classroom*. Scarborough: Chalkface Press.

Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (1984). *Young children learning: Talking and thinking at home and at school*. London: Fontana.

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Wells, G. (1981). Learning as interaction. In G. Wells (Ed.), *Learning through interaction: The study of language development*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Studies looking specifically at children with languages and dialects different from the teachers include:

Heath, S. (1982). Questioning at home and at school. In G. Spindler (Ed.), *Doing the ethnography of schooling: Educational anthropology in action*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Makin, L. (1983). Priority language needs of children learning English in Australian infants' schools. *TESOL News, 7*(1), 4–7.

Makin, L. (1992). Language teachers by necessity, not choice: Early childhood teachers in a multilingual society. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics Special Issue 9: Language teaching and learning in Australia, 59*, 33–48.

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Torr, J. (1993). Classroom discourse: Children from English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 16*(1), 37–56.

Wong-Fillmore, L. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6*(3), 323–346.

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Persistence when it's difficult

A disposition to learn for early childhood

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Learning dispositions: what are they?

The new early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, includes learning dispositions as "important 'learning outcomes'". But what exactly is a learning disposition? My dictionary has several definitions for "disposition", and the meaning of the word in an educational context is a combination of the following three:

- a person's usual *frame of mind*,
- a natural or acquired *tendency or habit*, and
- the *propensity to change in a certain way under certain conditions*.

The dictionary gives as an example that if something is brittle it has a disposition to break when struck. In education, if a child is described as shy it often means that he or she has a disposition not to get involved in the hurly-burly of a busy playground. A learning disposition is a tendency for children to respond to learning experiences in a particular way. Lilian Katz has written about dispositions as an aim for early childhood. She says:

> Dispositions are a very different type of learning from skills and knowledge. They can be thought of as habits of mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways. Curiosity is a disposition. It's not a skill, and it's not a piece of knowledge. It's a tendency to respond to your experience in a certain way.

Although dispositions are very different from knowledge and skills, they are often the product of a combination of knowledge and skill—if you know a great deal about dinosaurs, it is more likely that you will have the disposition to make some effort to find out more about them. If painting is a familiar experience and you have developed a range of skills with brush and paint, it is more likely that you will have the disposition to engage with a painting activity. We might say that a learning disposition is about being ready, willing, and able to learn.

However, the child who was described as "shy" in the early childhood centre playground may display considerable social skills at home with his or her siblings or cousins. Having the skill does not mean that it will be used on every relevant occasion. A disposition is about confidence and motivation and intention as much as about skills and knowledge. Many children for instance talk very little at the early childhood centre, while their families report that they talk all the time at home. One reason why the skill or learning strategy isn't necessarily displayed is, obviously, that a child doesn't want to use it, doesn't see that this is the occasion for it, or has an alternative goal for this occasion. So part of a disposition is an aim or a *goal*. Children come to an early childhood centre with various goals, and they will develop and discover new ones. At first their goals are probably to do with being safe, and belonging—to be reassured that they will be looked after, and to "know the ropes". As they become familiar with what sort of a place this is, and get to know some of the participants, their goals become more diverse and complex and probably more adventurous—to be Emily's friend perhaps, or to overcome the difficulties associated with making a dinosaur out of cardboard boxes. In the early childhood curriculum, five broad aims have been established:

- to be well,
- to belong,
- to contribute,
- to communicate, and
- to explore.

These strands provide a framework for children's goals as well as for what the community sees as desirable goals and learning dispositions.

So a learning disposition is an *inclination* to respond in certain ways under certain conditions, and it is closely associated with *children's goals*. Stereotypes are dispositions, the "schemas" that Anne Meade writes about in *Thinking Children* are dispositions, the "frames of mind" that Howard Gardner describes as different kinds of intelligences can also be thought of as dispositions. They all incline or dispose children to focus on some things and not on others, and to interpret their experiences in one way and not in another.

Why are dispositions important outcomes?

There are two major reasons why dispositions are important outcomes in education. The first has already been stated—dispositions incline children to *focus* on some parts of their experience and not on others, and they incline children to *interpret* interactions and experiences in certain ways. In other words, children use dispositions to construct their own learning environment from the array of experiences on offer. So if we are to understand what sort of learning experience they are getting, we need to understand their goals and their dispositions. We may want to change them. We are interested in education—increasing children's capacities for well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration; and not all goals and dispositions do that. Research in the United States by Carol Dweck and her colleagues describes "helpless-prone" children who have what Dweck calls "performance" goals. Performance goals are about displaying goodness and cleverness to others, and this leads to a disposition to avoid difficulty if there is a risk of displaying a self that is not good, or not clever.

The second reason is that dispositions influence later learning as well. Kathy Sylva, for instance, comments that positive early childhood experiences before school start a "virtuous cycle" that begins with what she calls "learning orientation" at school entry. The authors of the longitudinal study of High/Scope (an early childhood programme in the United States) followed their "graduates" to age 27 and comment that:

> The essential process connecting early childhood experience to patterns of improved success in school and the community seemed to be the development

> of habits, traits, and dispositions that allowed the child to interact positively with other people and with tasks. This process was based neither on permanently improved intellectual performance nor on academic knowledge.

They concluded that it was the habits and dispositions which create the lasting change for disadvantaged children.

What are key learning dispositions?

If stereotypes, schemas, frames of mind, being shy, being curious, are all dispositions, how is the concept helpful to practitioners? Lilian Katz says: "Much research is needed to determine which dispositions merit attention". If they are very specific, the list becomes unmanageably long, but if they are too general they become too difficult to pin down and describe. Katz suggests that the most important one is "the disposition to go on learning", and she adds that "any educational approach that undermines that is miseducation".

My research suggests that one way to describe a disposition to go on learning is "persistence when it's difficult". It is about engaging with uncertainty, being prepared to be wrong, risking making a mistake—going on learning. It's not the only learning disposition we might focus on, but it is surely a key one. In traditional times and traditional societies, early childhood education was a much more straight forward matter—to learn the ways of the elders, who transmitted the skills and knowledge that they knew the child would need. This is still part of it, even as we approach the 21st century, but education is now also about engaging with inevitable change. In early childhood we pride ourselves on the capacity of our programmes to nurture creativity and exploration. The disposition to persist when it's difficult, to find creative ways around problems, is an outcome very much in the spirit of that early childhood ethos.

An example: the disposition to persist when it's difficult

Participant observation at the construction area in an early childhood centre provides examples from three four-year-olds, Emily, Nell, and Valerie, to illustrate the disposition to persist when it's difficult.

Research elsewhere indicates that even two-year-olds differ in persistence during frustrating tasks. The examples also reveal that a disposition is influenced by the children's goals. These examples are from observations of girls. Although the boys were less likely to have "being a friend" as a goal in the construction area, they too revealed dispositions to engage or not to engage with difficulty and their goals made a difference.

Emily and Nell when their goal is Being a Friend

Emily, Laura, and Nell are experts at friendship games and scripts. When the goal is "being a friend", they can listen to another point of view, negotiate, tell stories of well-judged interest and length, prompt others' stories, indicate that they are listening, ask questions, and get their own way. They enjoy the toing and froing of power and difficulty, using and acquiring social skills, and figuring out how to re-route when the story-line signals that there's trouble ahead. On one occasion, for example, they share stories about going to the movies as they make "tiaras" at the construction table. Here is Emily describing an event that happened when she was at the movies—it is a story about a social error. Emily is telling it among friends, and she laughs at her mistake:

Emily: I saw a girl that looks like Christina and I said, Hello Christina, 'cos I thought you was a, 'cos 'cos I thought she was Christina, but she was another girl. Oh ;nistake. *(laughs)*

A few minutes earlier, Emily and Laura have been establishing their friendship by excluding Nell—Laura assumes an artificial voice to admire Nell's work. Emily perceives that this is an attempt at deception, and says to Laura in a loud whisper:

Emily: We don't like it really, eh?
Laura: Yeah, we just lying eh.
Nell: I heard that.
Laura: We love it, eh Emily?
Emily: No, we're only telling lies to each other.

This looks like trouble for Nell. However, she doesn't get upset, leave, or go and tell the teacher that Emily and Laura are being mean to her. She remains at the construction table, finding a place in the conversation when she can shift the "power" balance. Laura tells a story about her brother, then Nell tells a story about her father falling off the trampoline. Laura says she wishes she could have a go on a trampoline, and Nell seizes her chance:

Laura: Actually if I had a trampoline close to a swimming pool I could jump a very high jump and jump into the pool. *(they laugh)*
Nell: You can do it if you want 'cos we might invite you to my birthday.
Laura: Pardon?
Nell: Does your Mum know where Hauraki Downs is?
Laura: No. I don't even think she knows there.
Nell: Well you can't come to my birthday.
Laura: Well, why can't we ask your Mum?
Nell: We can.

The useful four-year-old strategy of offering a birthday party invitation is called into play, and suddenly the power is in Nell's hands. Nell too has a disposition to relish a challenge when friendship is on the agenda.

Emily and Nell when the goal is Being a Technologist

However, when the children perceive that the goal, game, or script is *not* about "being a friend", sometimes their persistence in the face of difficulty is very different. Emily, for instance, appears to be anxious about being wrong when the goal changes to being more technical. So does Nell. They don't show the same relaxed view of difficulty as they did when the goal was friendship. Here are some examples.

In the first example, Emily is watching the screen-printing process with interest; but when she hears that the process is difficult she decides not to attempt it:

Emily: You can do it any way you want eh?.... Can I do one?....
Ann: (teacher) Emily, you've got to come and get a piece of paper first and draw a picture and then you can do your print.
Emily: Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter.
Ann: *(later)* Emily, would you like me to help you? Show you what to do? Have you done one before?
Emily: Doesn't matter

Ann (later): Emily, if you don't want to do a screen print would you like to come with me and find some leaves to print? You just want to do the printing part? Come and let's find some leaves and things outside. *(she does, waits in line for the screen for a while and then goes off to paint with Nell)*

Ann perceives that Emily is avoiding difficulty, and she breaks the task down to reduce the difficulty level. This is a good strategy, and it would probably have worked if the screen printing had not been so popular. A queue formed, and Emily didn't wait.

In the second example, the observer is sitting beside Emily as she attempts to write her name.

Emily: Just a little mistake. *(pause)* That doesn't matter, eh? *(sounds anxious)*
Observer: No, that doesn't matter.
Emily: *(a short time later)* Oh. Mistake.
Observer: That's the "I". That's good. Yep.
Emily: *(stops writing)* I can't go up there.
Observer: That's all right.
Emily: 'Cos there's paint. Um up. There.

Emily is just beginning to write her name, but she is very reluctant to continue because of the risk of making a mistake. The observer follows the teachers' strategy of encouragement.

The third example is Nell's approach to hat-making. During my observations, the children spontaneously made 51 hats at the construction table. The standard design was cylindrical, using strips of card; often the cardboard strips provided were too short to go around a four-year-old head so there were technical difficulties associated with measuring and fitting. Many children found this an interesting challenge, but others, Nell included, avoid the measurement difficulty by making hats for babies or someone at home, and even for cats. All of the seven hats that Nell made were for cats or for "her baby", although she confides in Jason one day that she doesn't really have a baby. When I ask her if her cats really wear the hats she appears annoyed that I should ask such a question and responds airily: "On sunny days."

Valerie, when her goal is Being Good

Not all children tackled problems in the social arena with the same enthusiasm and skill as Nell, Laura, and Emily. On another occasion, when friendship and gender became amalgamated, Valerie appeared to switch to a "being good" goal and decided to retreat when difficulty appeared. Valerie and Molly are working together on a mural, collaging and painting to make a large butterfly for the wall. Tom and Danny arrive, and start "mucking about", causing trouble.

Tom: Ah, how do you stick it on?
Molly: Cellotape. *(Tom takes a very large piece of material and starts to cellotape it on)*
Valerie: Oh, don't stick it on so big. *(boys giggle)*
Tom or Danny: *(giggling)* Stick that on there with nothing on it.
Valerie: No. Stick it with the cellotape. We're making a butterfly. Don't get nothing on my spot. Don't get nothing on my spot. Don't want that cellotape on me. You got cellotape on me!
Tom: *(chanting)* Decorate it decorate it.
Valerie: *(standing up)* I'm going to wash my hands now.
Tom: Ta ta!
Danny: Ta ta! *(the girls leave)* Got it all to ourselves. Good, eh.

All went well until the boys arrived and started to behave "badly". They didn't cut the material up into small pieces, as the girls had been doing, and they generally "mucked about" with the cellotape. Valerie protests for a short time, then says she's going to "wash her hands". Her reputation as a good girl is at risk; she leaves, taking Molly with her.

Valerie, when the goal is Being a Technologist

On the other hand, when the task is technical (drawing, or making something), Valerie responds to difficulty with interest. I talk to her about her drawing:

Valerie: I draw at home and I. And it's difficult because it's difficult to do a cat I can't properly do a cat and a tail and I al- I al- I al- I can't manage the pen to do it straight.
Observer: Oh. You can't manage the pen to do the tail straight?
Valerie: No.
Observer: Right. Right. So do you think you'll get better at doing that?
Valerie: Yes, I think so.

And she discusses "trying" with the teacher as a strategy for learning to write her name.

Valerie works in an absorbed way folding card, trying to make it stand up and become three-dimensional in various ways (later other children will copy her). She writes her name: "I did my name all by myself". Later she makes a comment about other children asking adults to write their names for them.

Ann (teacher): Some people aren't just quite ready to write their own name yet so that's why the teacher helps them. But it's nice that you can try.
Valerie: I. I try always.
Ann: Well that's really good. 'Cos that's how you'll learn to write it.

She likes talking about making things. When Trevor appears to be wondering what to do with some cardboard tubes she advises: "You could take that home and do patterns on it". She talks to the observer about how to make a sunhat in a picture: "You could make a round cardboard and go like that (gestures) and then you could put some um cardboard around and then make and then cut it out to do that (points to peak) and then put a thing down the back".

Some children specifically told the observer that as a general rule they did *not* want to try anything difficult. Susie says "I don't do anything that's hard for me.... If my big sister does something really hard, I won't do it". Laura says "I do the things I know how to do". Trevor says that if you make a mistake you should "just leave it". Martin tells me that his constructions "never go wrong".

Educational implications

So a learning disposition, in this case to persist or not to persist when it's difficult, creates or closes down learning opportunities. And the disposition may change when the occasion and the child's goal changes. We cannot say that a child "has" a disposition to persist under every circumstance. I have suggested however that in some circumstances some dispositions may not be good learning

dispositions, and we can expect that experience in the early childhood centre will make a difference. Experience in alternative settings is important—Bronfenbrenner says that that's what development is all about. It provides alternative models and examples, introduces different values, calls on children to adapt their skills and knowledge, and may invite them to alter learned dispositions. If in the early childhood setting children are surrounded by adults who are genuinely curious about the world around them, it is likely that the disposition to be curious will "rub off". It becomes a habit, something that people characteristically do here. This point is made in *Te Whāriki*:

> To encourage robust dispositions to reason, investigate, and collaborate, children will be immersed in communities where people discuss rules, are fair, explore questions about how things work, and help each other.

Therefore, learning dispositions emerge from a community where the climate is "saturated" with desirable learning dispositions. Only one such learning disposition has been outlined here; centres will find others in *Te Whāriki* to highlight as well. Don't choose too many. To encourage persistence when it's difficult, the centre programme will include difficulty in a range of tasks and situations. Both children and adults will be making mistakes and discussing ways of solving problems, displaying that they don't know and making strenuous efforts to find out. In one of the centres I worked in, when I asked the children what was difficult for them, 22 of the 36 examples they responded with referred to difficult skills or situations *away* from the centre—usually at home. Many of the children didn't see the early childhood centre as a site for challenging activities; and many of them looked forward to school where they perceived the really challenging stuff was going on. We can perhaps learn something from the Reggio Emilia programmes in northern Italy, where projects are demanding, and children and adults argue and discuss difficult problems. Sometimes the teaching will be deliberate. In Emily's case, for instance, the adult was breaking down the technical task of screen printing for Emily to encourage her to have a go—not because there's anything intrinsically necessary about mastering screen printing, but to help her to overcome her reluctance to try something difficult and risk making a mistake.

NOTES

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The data reported here are part of an investigation which is nested inside a longer-term project on the Assessment of Children's Experiences, funded by the Ministry of Education Research Division and due to be completed at the end of 1997. In the first phase of this project, participant observation, children were observed in a kindergarten and a child care centre over a period of five to six weeks in each place. The kindergarten provides a sessional morning programme for 45 children aged four years—most of these children have previously spent six to nine months in an afternoon programme, three afternoons a week. The child care centre provides an all-day programme; the four-year-olds are part of a group of about twenty-five children aged from two to four years. Children's and adults' names are pseudonyms.

The author gratefully acknowledges the research grant from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Research Division; and permission to work in the early childhood centres given by families, staff, and management.

Lilian Katz's quote about dispositions is from pages 29–45 of:

Katz , L. (1988, Summer). What should young children be doing? *American Educator.*

That a learning disposition is about being ready, willing, and able to learn is from the quote:

> ...in a society where knowledge, values, jobs, technology and even styles of relationship are changing as fast as they are, it can be strongly argued that school's major responsibility must be to help young people become ready willing and able to cope with change successfully—that is, to be powerful and effective learners.

Claxton, G. (1990). *Teaching to learn.* London: Cassell.

Other writers on dispositions, focusing on older children and on "thinking", describe dispositions as having three parts (being ready, willing, and able)—inclination, skill, and sensitivity to occasion, see:

Perkins, D., Jay, E. & Tishman, S. (1993, January). Beyond abilities: A dispositional theory of thinking. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 39* (1), 1–21.

A particularly useful article for practitioners is:

Cullen, J. (1988). Preschool children's learning strategies. ***set:*** *Research Information for Teachers, 2* (item 15).

She makes the case for the continuity of four-year-olds' learning strategies at play in an early childhood centre, learning strategies that are later helpful in the classroom at school. One of her learning strategies is "task persistence", which connects with the disposition "to persist when it's difficult" in this paper.

For more detail on "schema" see:

Meade, A. (with Pam Cubey). (1995). *Thinking children.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

For more detail on "frames of mind" see:

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences.* New York: Basic Books.

Carol Dweck's research is published in a range of academic journals, and most of her work is with primary school aged children. For a paper with an early childhood focus, see:

Smiley, P. A. & Dweck, C. A. (1994). Individual differences in achievement goals among young children. *Child Development, 65,* 1723–1743.

That positive early childhood experiences start a "virtuous cycle" is quoted from page 162 of:

Sylva, K. (1994). School influences on children's development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 35*(1), 135–170.

The quote from the High/Scope study is from:

Schweinhart, L. J. & Weikart, D. P. (1993). *A summary of significant benefits: The High Scope Perry pre-school study through age 27.* Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope UK. Cited in Sylva (1994, p.162), *see* above.

Katz's quotes about the importance of the disposition to go on learning is from page 2 of:

Katz, L. (1993). *Dispositions: Definitions and implications for early childhood practices.* Perspectives from ERIC/EECE: A Monograph Series. Urbana, IL. ERIC Clearinghouse on EECE

That even two-year-olds differ in persistence during frustrating tasks is noted in:

Smiley & Dweck (1994), *see* above.

That experience in alternative settings is important for development is noted by:

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This work is still an enormously valuable framework for early childhood. The discussion of the context of early childhood curriculum in *Te Whāriki* on page 19 is based on Bronfenbrenner and informs the entire curriculum.

The value of being surrounded by adults who are genuinely curious about the world around them is made on page 44 of:

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early childhood curriculum.* Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.

For a useful resource on the Reggio Emilia programmes see:

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (Eds.). (1994). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

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EMERGENT LITERACY IN KINDERGARTENS

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Research into emergent literacy has demonstrated that children are more likely to develop an understanding of literacy concepts if they are involved in language- and print-rich environments. The literacy environment may include the *ambient print* or the print in the physical surroundings, such as print on the walls, books, posters, labels, and so forth. It may also include *print for personal or joint activities*, such as books, writing materials, labels, and lists. In addition to the possibilities for literacy in the environment, there are the literacy opportunities provided by *mediation of literacy activities*, such as conversations, songs, rhymes, and story reading.

THE STUDY

The research reported in this paper was undertaken in six kindergartens (referred to as K1, K2, etc) in a provincial city in New Zealand to observe the literacy environment and how literacy was practised. It also involved an examination of how current teaching practice in kindergartens and findings of emergent literacy research could be integrated into a curriculum in which children could learn the concepts of reading and writing before school entry. Both morning and afternoon sessions of kindergarten were observed, for a period of at least five days in each of the six kindergartens. Children ranged in age from three to five years and came from families in the highest, middle, and lowest socio-economic (SES) groups in the city. All the kindergartens were in purpose-built centres, with large floor areas, separate office and bathroom facilities, and a large outdoor play area. One kindergarten had two teachers and 40 children, while all the others had three teachers and 40–45 children in each session.

The observation method was designed to document the access that children had to print, language products, and writing materials; and also the way in which the literacy environment was mediated for children. Methods for data collection were based on the sequence of steps developed by Taylor, Blum and Logsdon (1986) for designing and rating a language- and print-rich classroom. These are:

- Locate, list, and define the types of print in the classroom (the ambient print)—is it meaningful and relevant to children?
- Identify the domains of literacy activity—books, communications, lists, labels, recipes, writing materials, and so forth.
- Observe opportunities for interaction with the literacy environment—do children have both access to the literacy environment and mediation by adults and children?

AMBIENT PRINT

As Table 1 indicates, there is wide variety in the type and number of incidences of ambient print in the kindergartens, although most of it is directed towards parents. There are a number of labels in most of the kindergartens too, which could be directed at parents or children. K6 is noteworthy, as it not only has the most print of all the kindergartens, it also had the most songs, rhymes, and bilingual communications. Much of this material was directed at children, being songs and rhymes which were used in mat or music sessions, and these were often presented in an appropriate format.

One of the difficulties that teachers frequently expressed about the kindergarten buildings was the lack of wall space to display anything at the children's height. In most kindergartens, the locker lists, which were in some cases excellent ways of connecting a word with an object, were hung up above the lockers where only adults could see them, so that an activity which was based on promoting literacy and word-concept recognition was made inaccessible to children.

Three kindergartens made process-cooking recipe charts available daily in permanent positions. Another good example of making print available was seen in K2 with the use of an easel with the "daily news" on it, although this was not used for sheets of songs during the mat session, as it could have been. Similarly, bright presentation of children's rhymes in pictures of cows, fire engines and so forth in K6 around the mat area provided an effective way of integrating print into the daily mat session, as children were made aware that teachers were reading the words off the wall. It is worth noting that only in K4 and K6 were books spread throughout the kindergarten. In the other kindergartens, books were mainly confined to a book corner.

At a superficial glance, the kindergartens in this study could be said to be "print rich", as there was a lot of print on the walls. However, they did not all have print which was meaningful and relevant to children. Print was largely inaccessible to children by its location high on the walls and by the fact that print was mainly directed at adults.

USING PRINT FOR ACTIVITIES

The research identified a variety of ways print was used for the children's personal or joint activities, including the following:

BOOKS AND OTHER STIMULI FOR READING

Kindergartens had between 200 and 900 books on their inventory, with an average of between 500 and 600 books. In all of these kindergartens there were books, puzzles, and posters; and in most there were some songs, rhymes, or bilingual communications on the walls. In addition, there were product boxes in the collage materials, such as cereal or toothpaste cartons. Often old Christmas or birthday cards and magazines were part of the collage materials.

The supply of books in the kindergartens was adequate, according

TABLE 1: AMBIENT PRINT: NUMBERS AND TYPES OF PRINT AVAILABLE IN KINDERGARTENS

Kindergartens	*K1*	*K2*	*K3*	*K4*	*K5*	*K6*
Labels	11	24	9	16	4	15
Songs /rhymes	1	3	0	1	7	14
Bilingual communications	5	5	7	1	7	18
Parent communications	9	7	15	11	15	24
Posters	2	5	2	1	1	2
Notices for children	1	1	2	0	1	2
Rosters and lists	1	1	3	0	1	3
Recipes	0	1	1	6	0	1
Schedules	1	1	0	1	1	0
Totals	31	48	39	37	37	79

to the guidelines for equipping a literacy rich classroom, that is, five to eight books per child, with a changing supply of at least 25 books every week or two. However, few were on display and some were in unusual locations, such as the foyer to the toilets.

Some of the kindergartens effectively displayed books related to a curriculum theme on low tables, which children were seen to look at frequently. In order to maximise the relevance and accessibility of books for children in the curriculum, teachers need to think carefully about where the books are located, how they relate to the objectives of the curriculum or theme at the time, how they can be located and used to promote connections between reading and writing, and what role adults will play in promoting their use.

COMMUNICATIONS AND LISTS

Much of the communications on the walls of these kindergartens was parent education—telling parents what their child is learning from activities and how they should be helping children to learn.

There were lists in all the kindergartens, although only some of the lists were intended for children. One of the good examples of a list for children was the easel in K2 which was used at the beginning of the session, when the teachers discussed what the focus of the session would be and what the highlights of the week would be. Most lists were clearly directed at adults, for example, the locker lists, donations lists, and lists of children in the morning or afternoon programme, with the exception of the weather chart and the washing list in K6 which were located at child level and were observed to be used in the mat session.

Beyond these examples, however, lists were rarely used as a means of organising children's activities or for promoting the ability to write a child's name. Children have an increased interest in literacy when they can claim ownership of it, such as writing their own name. There were too few opportunities in these kindergartens for children to make connections between reading and writing. Getting children to write lists and labels would be an important first step toward promoting literacy in these kindergartens.

SCHEDULES

Only four of the kindergartens had a written schedule of the curriculum. Schedules gave information to parents, in varying degrees of detail, about what the focus or theme of the curriculum would be and what activities and events parents could expect. There was no sense in which the information was aimed at children. The closest example of a written schedule of activities for children was the easel in K2 which held a written list of the day's and week's activities in simple words. The same information was given verbally in other centres, but the opportunity to connect the topic (for example, insects) with the word was a real strength in the curriculum in K2. Many of the opportunities for children to make meaningful connections between print and words or events were lost in the majority of kindergartens. Inclusion of schedules directed at children would be one of the features of a print-rich learning environment.

LABELS

Of interest was the different ways in which labels were used. Both K2 and K4 used labels to identify boxes. K2 labelled boxes of spare clothes in the bathroom. K4 stored cooking ingredients in labelled boxes. Both uses provided clear links between the object and the word. However, few kindergartens extensively labelled activities. This oversight was noticeable in K3, where the nature table had a collection of interesting looking things on it, but there was not a label in sight. This lost a valuable opportunity to connect an object with print and also made it difficult for parents to discuss the contents of the table with their children.

Children's names were available on magnets attached to a metal plate in many kindergartens. Children were encouraged to locate and take their name to their painting or collage and to copy their name on to their work. This use of labelling provided good opportunities for children to learn to write their own name, although it is unlikely that locating writing materials with the artwork materials and getting children to write their name will by itself lead to children making connections between reading and writing.

As with the minimal use of lists in the kindergartens, labels were a little-used avenue for promoting literacy. Teachers may be underestimating children's ability to write and denying them opportunities to express their emergent literacy through writing sign-up lists, labels, and books. Just providing the necessary resources is insufficient, as children will also need encouragement or direction on how to write. Children could be routinely encouraged to label anything which they bring to kindergarten to put on the nature table or to write a short story about it, using their own invented spellings of words. Teachers could also add to labels, so that other children and adults could identify the objects.

DISPLAYING CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE PRODUCTS

Few of the centres displayed many examples of children's artwork, and those that were displayed rarely had examples of children's attempts at writing. Most artwork had an adult's writing on it. One of the problems was the layout of the kindergartens, with very little wall space at child level. Artwork was typically displayed very high above a child's level, usually on the wall near the ceiling or attached to the rafters. K3 had effectively used strings across the room to display self portraits at a lower level, above the mat, which was much more accessible to children. The lack of display of children's literacy attempts may have been because teachers sent all artwork home with children, or because the "process" orientation of the curriculum meant that teachers did not prize children's writing products.

WRITING MATERIALS AND OTHER STIMULI FOR WRITING

All the kindergartens had writing materials on display on every day of the observations. A variety of paper was also available for children to write, draw, paint, or glue with, which was often provided on a purpose-built low table with two shelves for different types of paper or cardboard. Generally, children had access to pens, crayons, scissors, glue, staplers, a variety of collage materials and paper, and plastic letters.

Writing materials were located by the collage materials in all of the

kindergartens. This practice implicitly links writing with artwork, rather than reading and writing. In all of the kindergartens, collage materials were located at opposite ends of the classroom from the book shelves, making connections between reading and writing difficult to achieve. The only exception to this was K6, which also had selections of books on tree stumps within the collage area of the classroom.

The children were able to make use of writing materials during the "free play" periods of the session. Often extra writing resources were put outside for children to use, although writing materials were observed to be used outside more frequently in summer in good weather. Only in K2 were children observed spontaneously making "books". There were few examples of teachers helping children to write in this research, but in all observed incidences, the teacher focused on writing the child's name. Simply supplying writing materials for children is not enough to promote emergent writing. Writing materials need to be located in various parts of the classroom and promoted through dramatic play. Children need opportunities to interact with writing materials with more competent peers and adults if they are to learn the range of possibilities that the materials provide.

MEDIATING LITERACY

It was interesting to note the different opportunities children had to interact with the literacy environment and how literacy was mediated by teachers, parents, and other children.

DIRECTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Verbal directions were used in a variety of ways to enable children to take part in activities. They were used to re-organise children's behaviour, as they took part in literacy activities, but were also used to teach children how to take part in literacy activities, such as story reading, singing, and puzzles. There was a relationship between literacy activity in the kindergarten and social rules. There were rules to the ways that children were allowed to participate in singing or story-reading sessions, which were clearly articulated by teachers. Statements such as "go now and find something else to do", "crawl away", and "tip-toe in" told children how they were to behave at the end of literacy activities. Teachers were seen to organise children into accepted behaviour for listening to a story—collecting them into a certain place, so all children could see, and teaching them how to sit and listen. "Sitting on your bottom" was a catch cry in many centres, usually reserved for controlling behaviour during literacy activities on the mat. Directions for singing activities often involved telling children not only what song would be sung, but also how to sing more effectively or modelling how to keep a rhythm.

Directions given were usually clear and direct, rather than in the form of questions, so children had ready access to the teacher's meaning and new strategies of completing activities. The verbal directions observed in these New Zealand kindergartens are similar to Anning's (1991) findings in British preschools—that despite their belief in the importance of "free play", teachers promote literacy in a very direct and routinised way. The "voice" of the teacher is clear in these situations—literacy is important and has clear rules for behaviour. Children undoubtedly do need clear direction in how to take part in literacy activities. It is, therefore, reassuring to find that although head teachers and assistant teachers, in other parts of this research, defined themselves as facilitators of the curriculum, rather than teachers of young children, they were in fact exercising many scaffolding skills, such as modelling literacy behaviour, guiding participation, feeding back, instructing, and questioning children.

Management of centres is a feature of the kindergartens, which is not surprising, given the ratio of three adults to 45 children. The research shows that a lot of the teacher-child interaction which children experience was management oriented—toward time, behaviour, and care of equipment. As a model of what the teaching-learning relationship is like, it probably is a realistic introduction to what much of children's education will be like. However, it can be argued that teachers spend too much time on management of classrooms and too little time interacting with children. Although giving children access to literacy is important, it is debatable whether the structure and behaviour management of the mat session is the ideal way in which to introduce children to a meaningful interaction with print.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION WITH PRINT

Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon (1986) argue that some curriculums are more effective than others at providing opportunities for interaction with print. Because of the lack of writing observed, it would seem that the major opportunity that children have to interact with print in kindergartens is through looking at and reading books. In all kindergartens but K4, many examples of children "flicking" through books were recorded—a child would walk up to a book shelf, pick up a book, and rapidly turn over the pages, without really looking at them. Often they would do this to several books in succession, before walking away. While sometimes the flicking behaviour led into more settled reading behaviour with another child or

an adult, more often the flicking behaviour did little to prove that children knew how books could be used.

LARGE-GROUP STORY READING

Many of the examples of behaviour rules regarding literacy in kindergartens were generated from mat sessions, with 40 to 45 children and a teacher attempting to complete a literacy task and maintain some order. Behaviour cues were common, so too were opportunities to learn routines for literacy, such as taking turns during group games, and listening to the teacher or to a child whose turn it was to speak while on the mat.

Teachers reading in front of a large group of children typically held the book out in front of themselves and read the words by glancing over the top of the book. Often they asked questions of children at the end of pages. Favourite books were used in different ways in kindergartens, such as acting the story out in a mat session or getting children to predict the next part of a much-loved story. These examples show that teachers can incorporate reasonably effective literacy events in the large-group setting, despite the routines for behaviour which are required to maintain order.

SMALL-GROUP STORY READING

Children were read to in all of the kindergartens, usually on request, often by parents at the beginning of sessions to help settle them or by teachers and parent helpers during the sessions. A slow paced, conversational style was more typical of the small-group reading sessions. There were few examples of the behaviour rules, which typify the large-group reading sessions, such as "sitting on your bottom" and "zip up your lips", and there was a lot more conversational questioning. There were clear examples of teachers drawing on children's home knowledge and experiences to aid comprehension of the text. Routines were also part of this aspect of mediation of literacy, which focused on a question-and-answer format and children's understanding, rather than controlling behaviour. Small-group reading has been found to be a good way for children to actively construct an understanding of the meaning of the text, with the opportunity to ask questions, and by relating the story to their own experience, and hearing about the experiences of others.

SONGS

Songs and rhymes were one of the real strengths of mediation of literacy in the kindergarten. Not only did children enjoy playing instruments and joining in the routines of the games, they also became familiar with the sounds of language. Children who were not seen to seek out small-group reading opportunities were seen to join in singing or rhyming sessions, thus providing an opportunity for them to hear a variety of language forms and to gain new vocabulary. Early knowledge of nursery rhymes is strongly related to the development of phonological skills and other emergent reading abilities. Therefore, our finding that kindergartens so strongly promote songs and rhymes in the curriculum reveals a major source of language enrichment for children.

CHILD-CENTRED ACTIVITIES

In other parts of the research project, teachers had said how important they considered talking with children to be as a way of promoting language and literacy development, but it was interesting to see whether teachers with a three to 45 staff-to-child ratio would be able to find time to talk to children during a two-and-a-half hour session. In fact, some rich examples of teachers interacting with children were observed. These interactions encouraged the children to respond to and to expand upon their statements.

The other major type of child-centred activities was peer mediation of stories and activities. In some instances, such as the incidents described as "flicking", children did not engage with reading a book until they were joined by a friend. In all of the kindergartens, examples of children telling each other how to use materials and the rules of activities were observed. The children were seen to show a clear familiarity with the routine of an activity and were able to communicate that information to other children. Such familiarity suggests that children regularly have had opportunities to experiment with songs, rhymes, and games to the extent that they are becoming independent in their activity. This sort of peer collaboration and conflict around literacy activities has been found to be beneficial to children's understanding of a task. Enriching the environment in a preschool classroom can lead to increased collaboration and scaffolding between peers in the classroom. With the difficulties inherent in the three-to-45 ratio, increasing peer collaboration on literacy tasks would be a valuable step toward promoting children's emergent literacy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROMOTING EMERGENT LITERACY

The following list briefly highlights the key issues arising from the research which need to be considered if children are going to be encouraged to develop emergent literacy skills and abilities prior to school entry.

- Have teachers identified what they know and believe about literacy development? Are these beliefs compatible with the interactive teaching methods recommended for helping children to develop emergent literacy? What training issues need to be addressed?
- The "voice" of teachers is clear—literacy is important in kindergartens and has rules for behaviour. Why have these rules developed? Are the settings currently used for literacy in kindergartens the most appropriate? How could more small-group activity or peer collaboration be encouraged in centres? What role could parents play in increasing opportunities for small-group activities?
- Is print accessible, meaningful, and relevant for children?
- Where are the books located? How do they relate to the objectives of the curriculum or theme at the time? How will they be used to promote connections between reading and writing? What role will adults play in promoting their use?
- Are real opportunities provided for children to make connections between reading and writing? Children can be involved in the functional aspects of

labelling objects and areas, which will help them to make the connection between print and the object, and will also help them to recognise the functional usefulness of print.

- Consider keeping valuable wall space for information directed towards the children, and use a newsletter for information directed towards the parents.
- Supplying writing materials is not sufficient to encourage emergent literacy. Children need them in many areas of the curriculum in which they can symbolic play and interact with more competent others.
- Children do need instruction to help them develop. Teachers need to provide opportunities for children to receive instruction and modelling of reading and writing skills which they will be able to practise and appropriate as their own.
- A lot of literacy time is management oriented—time, behaviour, and equipment. It is debatable whether the mat session is the ideal context for literacy, as it is a relatively passive event for the child. However, since the mat session serves a useful purpose of providing language games, chants, and rhymes which encourage letter name knowledge and phonemic awareness, perhaps mat sessions should be provided in smaller groups of 10–15 children, rather than the whole-class group at once?
- Children need both opportunity and encouragement to write. Kindergartens need to integrate opportunities for writing in all areas of the curriculum and provide opportunities for multi-media construction (especially if painting and writing areas are side by side) such as writing lists, letters, books, and labels. Children can be encouraged to publish their own books or exhibitions, and to share them within a small group.
- Too many children simply flick through books. Although teachers need to encourage symbolic play with books, as this is important developmentally, teachers need to pay attention to how children are using books, and to link books more closely to the curriculum. As story reading is one of the most important promoters of emergent literacy, teachers need to offer to read a story or encourage peer collaboration.
- Real strengths for promoting literacy were found in the small-group story reading and literacy activities and in the use of songs, rhymes, and chants. These sessions provide crucial opportunities for children to learn letter name and phonological awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the major findings of this research is that although there are similarities in the way in which literacy is promoted in kindergartens, there are also some real differences in the extent to which children have access to a language- and print-rich environment. This research indicates that:

- Few kindergartens provide a print-rich environment for *children*.
- All kindergartens have some aspects of language- and print-rich environments.
- Language-rich interactions were primarily seen in small-group settings.
- The teacher's "voice" is seen in all literacy activities, but opportunities for children to learn literacy skills and abilities were best in the small-group setting, where children can try out new skills with support.

NOTES

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The research reported here is more fully described in:

McLachlan-Smith, C. (1996). *Emergent literacy in New Zealand kindergartens: An examination of policy and practices.* Unpublished doctoral thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

The "concepts of print" ideas are expoused by:

Clay, M. (1982). *Observing young readers: Selected papers.* London: Heinemann Educational Books.

The method of defining and rating a language- and print-rich classroom was adapted from:

Taylor, N. E., Blum, I. H. & Logsdon, D. M. (1986). The development of written language awareness: Environmental aspects and program characteristics. *Reading Research Quarterly, Spring,* 132–149.

That teachers promote literacy in a direct way is noted by:

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For a multicultural New Zealand perspective on emergent literacy see:

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For a current view of the research on how to promote emergent literacy in early childhood centres see:

Kantor, R., Miller, S. M. & Fernie, D. E. (1992). Diverse paths to literacy in a preschool classroom: A sociocultural perspective. *Reading Research Quarterly, 27* (3), 185–201.

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QUALITY CHILDCARE
do parents choose it?

ANNE B. SMITH • CHILDREN'S ISSUES CENTRE • UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
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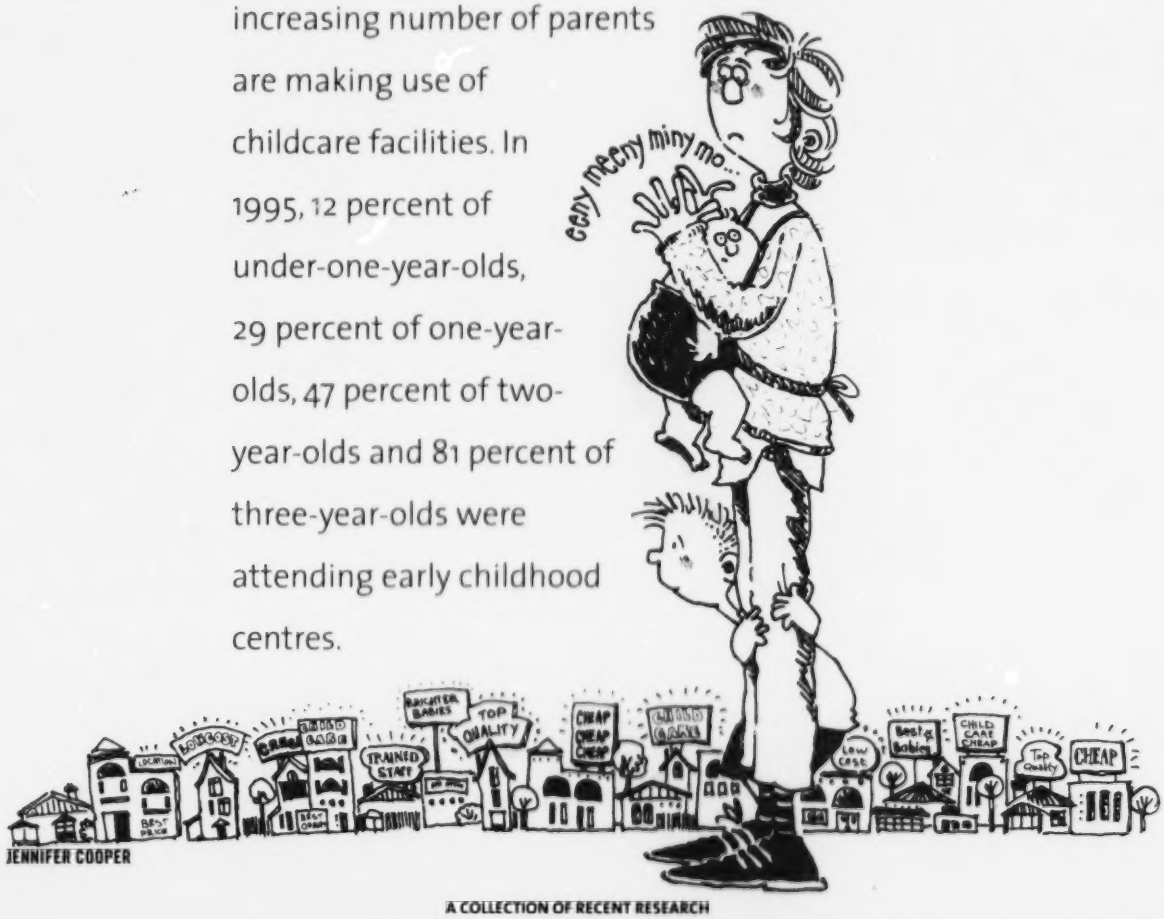
An increasingly important task for today's parents is choosing a good quality childcare centre for their children. It has even been suggested that people give more care to choosing a good car or refrigerator for the family than they do to choosing a good childcare centre for their child. While in the past commercial childcare for very young children was a choice that only a very small minority of parents were concerned about, current statistics show that now an increasing number of parents are making use of childcare facilities. In 1995, 12 percent of under-one-year-olds, 29 percent of one-year-olds, 47 percent of two-year-olds and 81 percent of three-year-olds were attending early childhood centres.



JENNIFER COOPER

One would expect, however, that most parents with children in childcare centres would be concerned if they thought that they were choosing mediocre or poor centres for their vulnerable children, but a recent study we carried out suggests that parents may need information and support to help them make a proactive choice of quality childcare.

What is meant by the term quality childcare? Some researchers have argued that quality childcare is a relativistic term which reflects the values of the stakeholder concerned. Pence & Moss say that:

> Quality child care is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder — and that beholder can be anyone or any group from among a range of stakeholders, each with an interest in early childhood services.

The more orthodox view of quality, defining it as a set of objective qualities which have been empirically related to child development, is expressed in this quotation:

> In research, quality has been viewed in several ways. First, global assessments of quality have been used to capture the overall climate of a program. Second, efforts to extract the specific dimensions of quality have emphasised (a) structural aspects of child care, such as group composition and staff qualifications (b) dynamic aspects of child care that capture children's daily experiences, and contextual aspects of child care, such as type of setting, and staff stability.

Research on childcare has looked at differences in the processes and structures of childcare settings and relates them to developmental outcomes for children. Processes that have been studied include the nature of the interactions between adults and children (in particular the sensitivity and responsiveness of the adults towards the children). The structures included factors such as ratio, group size, training, and staff turnover. One conclusion of this research is that good things go together, in other words that the different indicators of quality tend to co-exist. For example if there are good ratios, small group sizes, low staff turnover, and well-trained staff there are more supportive and sensitive interactions with children.

Unfortunately structural factors are easier to measure and have been focused on, but in fact process measures are the best indicator of quality. Structural measures may be associated with quality but they do not guarantee it.

Our research certainly supports the view that quality means different things for different people. We decided to have a closer look at some data we had collected in a study of 100 New Zealand childcare centres catering for under-two-year-olds. The study involved talking to the centre supervisor and staff (two from each centre), and observing the children (two from each centre) using running records and an interval recording technique. The quality of the centre environment was looked at with an American checklist called the Assessment Profile. The Assessment Profile is based on the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice and of findings which statistically link scores on this scale to measures of children's well-being, and cognitive and social competence, and development. It can be seen as an objective measure of quality because it is an external scale, which has to be used carefully and accurately (different people using it come up with the same or similar scores when they use it in a centre), but it is also based on values about what is good for children's development.

The three observers for the study were all early childhood trained people and they made anecdotal notes of their impressions after each childcare centre visit. Here is an example of what one early childhood trained researcher said in her notes about a centre:

> She (a staff member) said there had been ... occasions of hitting. I didn't feel things were totally unstimulating... (They) left a very distraught infant to scream for approximately 20 minutes before (the child) fell asleep.... (The supervisor) also forced a three-year-old boy to sit on the potty for 30 minutes. The child was extremely upset ... she seemed embarrassed at my presence and let him go outside finally.... I find the centre an upsetting place to be.... A most unpleasant experience. During my time at the centre I saw children being told to go away and that they would be sent to bed if they didn't stop being naughty, infants being told they were naughty if they cried, children laughed at when they were upset, not to mention the potty incident ... a real eye opener!

We had parents fill in a questionnaire about their background and their satisfaction with their child's centre. We asked them what the worst and best things were about the centre. This is what two parents of children at the same centre said when asked what were the best and worst things, about the centre described above:

> The best thing is: My child is getting great interaction with other children of varying ages. The supervisor and her staff—I hold total confidence in their handling of my child. The worst thing is: Nothing.

> The best thing is: The friendly relaxed environment, always willing to listen to concerns/queries. (My child) loves the stimulation of other young people. The worst thing is: Nothing.

This centre scored 56 on the Assessment Profile (on the 43rd percentile—that is 57 percent of centres scored higher than this one) so it did not do very well from a global research perspective on quality. According to the researcher the centre was one of the worst quality centres she had seen (out of about 35 she had looked at) but for the parents the centre was a warm, happy place which provided an excellent environment for their child.

The statistical findings of the study were that there were low but positive correlations between parents' education, income, and socio-economic status and the Assessment Profile scores. In other words parents with more material and educational resources were a little better at choosing centres

Parents actually deny their own feelings about their child being in a poor quality centre in order to protect themselves from feelings of guilt.

> Parents and researchers appeared to construct entirely different meanings for the term quality, or at least to see different aspects of quality reflected in the operation of the centre.

which met standards of high quality. However, we were quite surprised that the correlations were quite low (the highest being around .27—between total Assessment Profile scores and the parents' education) predicting less than 9 percent of the variance. This suggested only modest support for the view expressed by previous researchers that some parents, because of their background, are better able to choose quality centres than others.

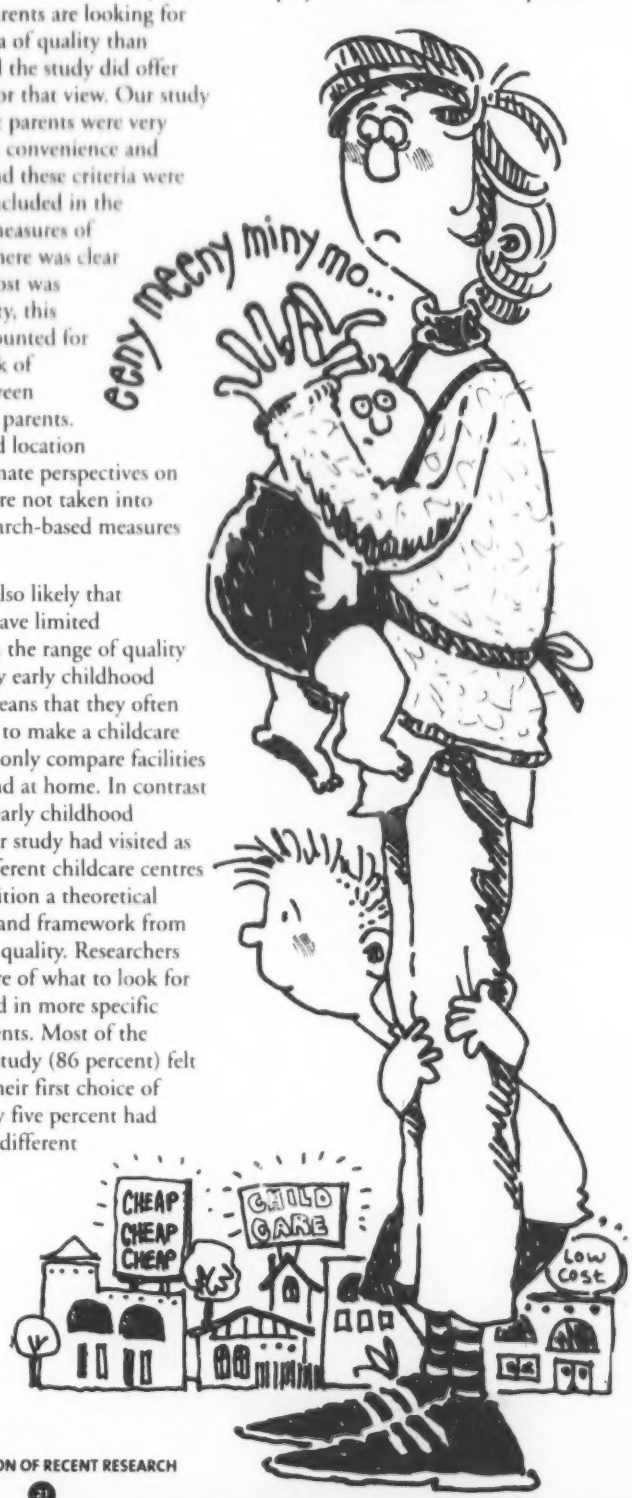
We also looked at whether parents' satisfaction with their child's centre was related to our research-based measures of quality. To our great surprise most of the correlations were near zero. Most of the parents indicated that they were very happy indeed with the quality of their child's centre, regardless of the quality of the centre according to our measurements and judgments. One of the most interesting findings was that parents whose children were in high-quality centres had more critical things to say than the parents whose children were in mediocre or low-quality centres. For example in high-quality centres 67 percent of parents mentioned a worst thing about the centre, while in poor-quality centres only 38 percent of parents could think of a worst thing. Most parents whose children were attending high-quality centres tended to comment both positively and negatively about their child's centre.

Why do early childhood trained people and research measures present such a totally different picture of centres from parents? Parents and researchers appeared to construct entirely different meaning for the term quality, or at least to see different aspects of quality reflected in the operation of the centre. Some of the centres which caused the researchers a good deal of concern because of possible harmful effects on children were perceived very favourably by parents.

There are a number of possible explanations for the lack of agreement between parents and researchers on the quality of care for infants. Firstly it is possible that parents are looking for different criteria of quality than researchers, and the study did offer some support for that view. Our study did suggest that parents were very concerned with convenience and affordability, and these criteria were generally not included in the observational measures of quality. Since there was clear evidence that cost was related to quality, this could have accounted for some of the lack of agreement between researchers and parents. Clearly cost and location are quite legitimate perspectives on quality which are not taken into account in research-based measures of quality.

However, it is also likely that many parents have limited experience with the range of quality encompassed by early childhood centres. This means that they often have little basis to make a childcare choice and can only compare facilities with those found at home. In contrast the researcher/early childhood educators in our study had visited as many as 50 different childcare centres and had in addition a theoretical understanding and framework from which to judge quality. Researchers were more aware of what to look for and commented in more specific terms than parents. Most of the parents in our study (86 percent) felt that they had their first choice of quality but only five percent had actually visited different centres before deciding on which one to use. Hence many parents may never have seen good-quality care giving them no basis for comparison and choice.

Another possible explanation is that parents actually deny their own feelings about their child being in a poor-quality centre in order to protect themselves from feelings of guilt. Parents may have to settle for lower-quality childcare due to lack of availability of good centres or their own employment, income, or transportation



situation. They may also have limited access to knowledge or information about childcare quality and lack networks for finding out about it. Many parents probably do not know enough to effectively evaluate quality and make critical choices. They may have knowledge in general terms but many do not appear to know specifically what to look for. There are a few parents who are highly knowledgeable and critical about childcare, but the correlational data certainly does not say that these are all middle class, well-educated parents.

We do not argue against the view that family values about quality are an important and useful basis for making choices of childcare. Parents do of course have an important role to play in defining quality as do government agencies and employers, but I would like to suggest that both researchers and trained people working within early childhood centres also have a role, and indeed a major role, in defining quality.

An important issue is how we negotiate a set of values to guide the directions of our early childhood programmes. We believe that values are important and that they need to incorporate the views of an involved and participating group of stakeholders; to reflect our culture, history, and cumulative early childhood discourse; up-to-date knowledge about children and the children's best interests. Children's rights and best interests need to provide an important part of the framework for our collective set of values, because children are powerless and vulnerable to exploitation. We have problems with accepting a totally relativistic view that all stakeholders have equal knowledge and that one stakeholder's viewpoint is as good as another one. People with training and experience clearly have a strong basis for judging quality, and they are more likely to take a child-oriented research-based perspective.

The most serious implication of this study is that we need to be critical of the neoliberal view that parent choice is a viable means of increasing quality in education. Other researchers have already found fault with the model. It assumes that because parents seek out high quality childcare it will flourish, and that low-quality facilities will decline and die because parents will not choose them. We question whether market models of rational decision-making work, since our study does not provide strong support for the view that most parents make careful decisions in favour of quality (for a variety of reasons). If parent choice is to be a viable way of determining quality, it needs to be based on knowledge as well as personal preferences and circumstances. An important implication is that many parents need access to unbiased information and advice about criteria for making choices. Also educational policies which provide incentives for centres to provide good quality and disincentives for poor quality still need to be maintained and improved. Otherwise the long-term consequences for children may be costly and damaging.

NOTES

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For more details of this study see:

Barraclough, S. J., & Smith, A. B. (1996). Do parents choose and value quality child care in New Zealand? *International Journal of Early Years Education, 4*(1), 5–26.

Smith, A. B. (1996). The quality of childcare centres for infants in New Zealand. *Monograph of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, 4*, 1–63.

That an increasing number of parents are making use of childcare facilities is shown in:

Future directions: New directions in Early Childhood Education in New Zealand (1996). Report of the Early Childhood Education Project. Wellington: NZEI Te Riu Roa.

That quality childcare is in the eye of the beholder is argued by:

Pence, A. & Moss, P. (1994). Towards an inclusionary approach in defining quality. In P. Moss & A. Pence (Eds.), *Valuing quality in early childhood services* (pp 172–180). London: Paul Chapman.

The more orthodox view of quality is defined in the following:

Phillips, D. & Howes, C. (1987). Indicators of quality child care: Review of research. In D. Phillips (Ed.), *Quality in child care: What does research tell us?* (pp 1–19). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Assessment Profile is detailed in:

Abbott-Shim, M. & Sibley, A. (1987). *Assessment profile for early childhood programs.* Atlanta, GA: Quality Assist, Inc.

That some parents, because of their background, are better able to choose quality centres than others is expressed by:

Holloway, S. & Fuller, B. (1992). The great child-care experiment: What are the lessons for school improvement? *Educational Researcher, 21*(4), 12–19.

That researchers have questioned the model of parent choice being a viable means of increasing quality in education is noted in:

Holloway & Fuller (1992), *see* above.

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THE TECHNICAL LANGUAGE CHILDREN USE AT HOME

MARILYN FLEER • UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

The introduction of national curriculum documents within Australia and New Zealand demonstrates how technology education has in recent years become a key learning area. Until recently, technology education was either not known or taught in secondary schools under a range of different names, with corresponding emphases. As a result, adults in the community, children, and teachers have tended to have different perceptions of technology education from those focused on by curricula developers.

Technology education as depicted in national documents in both Australia and New Zealand incorporates a design, make, and appraise approach (DMA) within the context of systems, materials, and information. This approach to technology education emphasises the human enterprise associated with and needed for creating products and processes in our everyday life. Yet as a field of study it is relatively new, and as a result very little is understood about how to teach this area.

Similarly, very little is known about what young children can do in this area before they commence school. What prior experiences are needed for children to work technologically in school? What assumptions are implicit within the technology curriculum regarding the skills and knowledge children need? Is there a belief that no prior knowledge is required? More needs to be understood about children's home experiences in technological activity if teachers are to implement appropriate and meaningful technological experiences for all children. This article presents the findings of an exploratory study which sought to identify the range of technological experiences children have at home. Whilst it is acknowledged that each home context will be unique, the findings of this study do provide an indicator of likely technological experiences some young children have before they commence school.

TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION —WHAT IS IT?

Over the last ten years we have heard debates surrounding the definition of the term technology. Mostly, technology is thought of as high or new technology such as a computer or recent invention. Little thought is given to simple technologies such as the paper clip, traditional technologies such as a coolamon [a wooden Aboriginal dish], support technologies such as the baby's bottle, or technological processes such as cattle breeding. If most teachers think only of high technology when they consider this key learning area, what does this mean for technology education?

Michael Scriven postured back in 1985 that technology education is a separate enterprise to science education. However, this perspective has been hotly contested by many. Since then we have seen many definitions of technology education emerge, including the following analysis by Paul Gardner (1992):

- *The technology-as-illustration approach* which considers technology as applied science. The science content is taught through using a particular piece of technology, for example, the use of microscopes or hand lenses to investigate small animals such as slaters.
- *The cognitive-motivational approach* which also treats technology as applied science. Students are introduced to a piece of technology early in a lesson to provide motivation for science learning, for example, they may examine how a toaster works, as a stimulus for investigating electricity.
- *The technology-as-artefact approach* which treats technology as the vehicle for understanding how various parts of an artefact interact, and what scientific principles are involved. For example, students may be asked to investigate a range of clocks through pulling them apart and determining how the spring operates, thus investigating energy.
- *The process approach to technology* where technology is considered a process of inventing, designing, making, and appraising. Scientific ideas are only considered as relevant when they contribute to this process.

More recently, technology education has become considered as a process, a way of thinking and doing by which students take responsibility for creating products which satisfy needs in society and

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the environment. This perspective underpins the thrust of *Technology: A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools* which leads the debate at the present time on the definition of technology education in Australia.

The discussions in the literature by curriculum developers and by teachers have centred around what is technology. However, little attention has been given to how best to facilitate technological capability in children. What do we know about children's cognitive preferences? How are these shaped in the early years by their home experiences? Do we take account of their intuitive playing in designing, making, and appraising, or do we simply impose experiences based on what we think is best for children's learning? What can we learn from children?

HOME-SCHOOL TECHNOLOGICAL ACTIVITY—DO THEY SUPPORT EACH OTHER?

Children as young as five are now expected to be involved in technology education. Yet, we know very little is known about how young children should be involved in this systematically organised curriculum. Only a small amount is understood about the difficulties associated with introducing technology education to young children.

Research into this area has shown that children from Western cultures draw from a front view perspective when involved in technology education and not a plan view, as is needed if they are to successfully engage in the design element of the design, make, and appraise approach detailed in the curriculum. Moving their orientation in drawing is achievable, but requires carefully constructed scaffolding on the part of the teacher.

In addition, cross-cultural work has indicated that Australian Aboriginal children from traditional communities have cultural experiences which make it very easy to draw from a plan view. For example sand drawings and many figures within Aboriginal art work are depicted from a plan view rather than a front view perspective. Young Aboriginal children from traditionally-oriented communities have many experiences with story-telling using plan view images in their sand drawings. However, little else is known about Aboriginal children's cultural experiences which are likely to facilitate engagement in technology education.

Clearly then, children's home experiences are important in determining the challenges that will be faced by teachers and children as they attempt to implement the technology curriculum in their classrooms or preschool centres.

THE STUDY

This article reports on the findings of one part of a study which investigated young children's technological experiences at home, prior to starting school.

Data were collected from children who attended a preschool and childcare centre. Children were interviewed whilst in their home environment. This was important in building an understanding of what technological activities children engaged in prior to, or at the same time as, attending childcare or preschool. In each case the children's teacher acted as the researcher—interviewing children within the context of a home visit, with

TABLE 1: HOME ROUTINES DESCRIBED BY CHILDREN

	Childcare children	*Preschool children*
Routines (general)	Puzzles and draw; look at picture books and go out and ride by bike, and go down to the horse paddock (Claire). I sometimes get my back pack ready; before sleep time in the day I will probably watch Playschool then, go out in my garden and pick some lovely flowers (Grace). Watch the music box, watch Blinky Bill at Dad's place (Sarah).	I have my lunch then I go outside and play. I jump with Tamara and Danielle (Regan). I have lunch then I play in my room. Then I play outside and chase butterflies and play with toys and make aeroplanes (Jessica). I take off my shoes to lie down on the couch. Then I have my lunch and then afternoon tea. Then I have a big drink of water and then have another rest (Lauren).
Routines (morning)	Get dressed; and go in the car and drive; I do what my mummy and daddy says; I choose for playing (Daniel). Put your clothes on very quickly then go to the daycare centre (Anthony). My mum would decide what I'm going to wear and, I decide what I'm going to play with (Claire). Mummy decides what I am going to wear (Daniel). I don't know (Anthony). I just think what I am going to wear (Matthew).	I get some clothes on... I get dressed and put on my shoes and make by bed and get my bag and then I am ready to go to preschool. I look at the weather, it tells me if it is sunny or cold. If its sunny I wear shorts and T-shirts and if it is cold I wear a flannel shirt (Regan). I tell myself to get dressed. I wear what clothes my mum puts out for me (Erin). I always get up and play with my Lego first. I wear clothes. I just know what to wear, I know when it is hot (James).

TABLE 2: PLANNING ACTIVITIES
(Childcare centre children only)

Level 1	Confusion	Planting. You're doing something (Anthony).
Level 2	Emerging ideas	Yeah. Planting. Got to think of something. Don't know what it means (Teddy). Um, I, I can plan, I can plan my train tracks and my, I can plan, playing with the train track and play which train I like. Um, I've got a book of planning about a cat (Daniel).
Level 3	Observational	That means, I know what it means. It means doing hard work, hard work. My dad is a worker. Sometimes he does a bit of planning. He probably, does a bit of planning of work. I think he just, the only, he talks to people on the phone and plans the ... people that help him (Grace).
Level 4	Event focused	Planning to do some things. Going to someone's house (Matthew).
Level 5	Construction oriented	When you plan something. You've got to, you can, you can plan something and then build it and, or what you want to do (Alyse).

the view to the child showing them around and talking to them about what they do at home. All data were analysed for what children do at home with regard to planning, making, and appraising with materials.

A total of 12 children (six boys and six girls, of average ability as described by their teachers, and aged between three years ten months and five years three months) from a childcare centre and a preschool centre in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were involved in this study. All the children in the preschool and the childcare centre were involved in the teaching program. However, only six case studies from each centre were featured in the data collection.

TABLE 3: PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EVENTS

	Childcare	*Preschool*
Holidays	We need my nighties, or my pull-ups. If I've got enough. Some clothes. Some bedtime books (Claire). We need bedspread, clothes, and camera (Daniel). I just um, think. Well some of my toys [That's all you will take?] Yeah because, they already have drinks at Grandma and Grandad's house. Or food, I don't need to take any food either. I just need to pack clothes and toys (Matthew). Beach ball, shovel and spades too. And a bucket. Food—meat you can eat, rolls everything. Pillow and combs, tooth brush and toothpaste (Teddy).	Mum decides (Jessica). They ring up on the phone and we talk about how we are going to get there and see if we need a car. Then we ring up the person. We also need to think about clothes (Erin). We go to the lake. We need to lock the house. We need to take food (Elliot). My dad decides. We pack our bags and go. He first sees if we all want to go. We need to lock the house (James). We usually plan by thinking, we think what place we are going to and then we catch a plane (Lauren).
Cooking	Flour. Pancakes. Flour, sugar, butter, mix it up and cook it (Claire). Well flour. Cornflour, eggs, butter, margarine. We could make sprinkle cakes or you could make cream cakes.... (Matthew). Ingredients. Chicken, potatoes, corn and that's all.... (Teddy). Hot chockies with Grandma. You put milk, ... you put the ? in the cup and you put, and there's chocolate in the top (Sarah).	Mummy decides and tells me that I will have chicken (Jessica). Us ... we say what we want for tea. We have a meeting and discuss—only us (Tim and Erin) and then we tell Mum we want spaghetti (Erin). Pizza—Geoffrey and I like pizza, Mum knows that (Elliot). We have what we feel like. I just ask Mum to have what I want (James). They choose it in their head and then they get an idea and then they use a cookbook to get the recipe (Lauren).

FINDINGS

If we examine the activities of an infant, toddler, and preschooler in the home we begin to see how the child's culture involves them in a multitude of planning opportunities. Whilst each child's family experience will vary, the range of possible technological activity could be quite vast. Rituals and routines, whilst not always articulated to the child, do form an important part of the child's ability to predict or plan what will happen. For example, children are involved in dressing, shopping, cleaning the house, washing, bath time, singing games, peek-a-boo, and bed time, to name but a few important processes for the child. Similarly, unusual events such as going on an excursion or to a party are usually preceded by oral planning. Preparation for a visitor, using a manual to set up a video, tune a car, set up a sewing machine, using a plan to assemble furniture, follow a street directory, using a TV guide, and using shopping centre guides are all technological activities that could take place in the home or surrounds.

We need to know more about the key rituals that children engage in which form an important part of their daily planning and which provide a foundation for effectively engaging in technology education at school/preschool. The three tables summarise, from the child's perspective, what technological tasks they are involved in when in the home.

Table 1 demonstrates a range of child-focused activities. In many instances the children have articulated these activities in the form of a progression. Most of the children have clearly expressed their ordered and planned world. With little prompting the children have been able to outline how their day is spent.

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with some making comment on how decisions are made with regard to these events. The act of planning is expanded upon in Table 2 where the children from the childcare centre outline what they understand about the word *plan*.

Five levels of thinking were evident in the responses given. Three children gave responses which demonstrated confusion (for example Anthony) or emerging understanding of the term (Teddy, Daniel). The term *planning* was confused with *planting*. However, two of the children were able to outline that it had something to do with thinking. Grace's understandings related to observing her father actively plan on the telephone. Similarly, Matthew related the term to planning for visiting someone. Alyse had a much broader understanding, she considered planning within the building process.

When planning was contextualised within a special event such as planning for a holiday or dinner the following responses were given by the children (*see* Table 3).

Planning for these children is clearly something that is quite familiar to them. Their responses indicate portions of processes that they are likely to undertake. For example, Teddy speaks in categories—toys, food, and then toiletries. Erin details how the planning process operates—phoning, travel requirements, and then packing. In the cooking example (Table 3), all the childcare children detail the types of ingredients they are familiar with, each labelling what they are cooking. The preschool children discuss how they plan what they are going to eat. Although the focus for the childcare and the preschool children was different, their responses indicate an awareness of planning for cooking (ingredients, decisions regarding what to cook).

What is interesting to note in each of the three tables is that planning for the children is essentially oral. The children have not made references to writing things down. One would expect that there would be some two-dimensional planning occurring in these families, such as writing a menu or a shopping list. However, child involvement in the formulation of lists is likely to be limited—although requests from the child may be added. In some families, lists of things to be done may be drawn up. However, only oral planning (as apposed to written planning) was mentioned in all interviews conducted with the children, except for the following comments, which resulted from asking the children about going shopping.

> I tell mummy what I want to buy. We have to write a shopping list (Jessica).

> We write down what we want on a list. But we first look in the cupboard and see if there is nothing (Erin).

There are three types of planning that are possible, oral, two-dimensional (for example, writing/drawing) and three-dimensional (for example, model-making). It can be speculated that the least likely form of planning that children would participate in at home or observe family members engage in is three-dimensional planning or model-making. It is possible that in craft-oriented families some modelling may occur, however, it is likely that only the adult will engage in this activity and not the child. Once again, this form of planning did not arise in all the data collected. Although the sample size is too small to provide the basis for generalisations, it does provide an indication of the predominance of planning young children are likely to experience.

If young children's experiences prior to school involve mostly oral planning, with minimal two-dimensional planning and very little or no three-dimensional experience, it is little wonder that children do not intuitively engage in two- or three-dimensional planning or design work in school. Most of their planning experiences are oral and hence children are more likely to use this mode for planning and designing. A great deal of experience with two-dimensional (written/drawing) and three-dimensional modes for planning and designing would be needed by children if they are to engage in anything other than oral planning when in preschool, childcare, or school.

MAKING

Children participate in a range of activities in the home where they make things. How children come to understand the materials and equipment that they use is well understood. Infants have a great deal of experience with oral exploration of materials. As the infant grows older the other four senses are used more. By the time children attend school they already understand a great deal about the properties of natural materials such as water, sand, air, rocks, leaves, and bark; and processed materials such as metal (pots and pans), plastics (tupperware containers), glass, paper, cardboard, and fabric. Yet their experiences with regard to adhering or joining materials, cutting materials, combining materials, or changing materials to make something new are less well understood. Similarly, their experiences with different types of construction kits such as Lego or Duplo will vary depending upon opportunity and adult intervention, interaction, or modelling.

The sets of materials children are likely to experience in the home context include:

- Recreational—jigsaws, craft work, and model building.
- Home environment maintenance—garden, house.
- People focused—food, baby care, sewing.

The children in the study were asked a series of questions on things they made with their family, or saw family members engage in. Responses to these questions are shown in Table 4 (responses by childcare children are grouped together under one heading since questioning/responses were merged, *see* question three).

The children's responses to making things with their parents or observing their parents make things indicated that a great deal of making was occurring in each family. The term *make* was easily understood by the children. The children were easily able to express their understandings and experiences of

TABLE 4: MAKING

	Childcare	*Preschool*
What things do you do or make with mummy?		We can't do much because she is always busy [after prompting] Yeah, I do help her make patty cakes (Regan). Sometimes we sweep up the wisteria and we water the flowers and strawberries. We look after the pussy cat and hang the washing out. We do drawings, get the firewood, and I help Mummy with flowers (Jessica). We make cakes and do the washing. Outside we plant flowers and go for walks (Erin). I help Mum plant, cook the dinner, and make pictures and put frames around them. I draw with Mummy and go riding (Elliot). I make cakes and things ... muffins, pikelets, and pancakes. Outside Mum helps me build (James).
What things do you do or make with Daddy?		We build cubby (Regan). I collect firewood and help Daddy prune the apricot tree. I help him make dinner (Jessica). We swim and play in the water and we go to the shops. We draw pictures (Erin). I help Daddy split the wood and make a big pile. We make books and we made a bird feeder (Elliot). I go to his work sometimes.... I play on the whiteboard. Daddy uses it when he goes to meetings (Lauren).
What does your Mummy/Daddy make or do at home?	They make ice blocks, my Mum makes ice-blocks when Mum gets home because I'll be able to have some spaghetti bolognaise. She makes teddy-bear jumpers (Alyse). Some sewing. Mum does sewing. Dad doesn't know how to do them. He knows how to make, to cook fish fingers. He makes lunches (Claire). [After prompting] Making a book shelf mmm, ... he got a piece of wood, put some glue onto into them then got another one and stuck it down to the other, and stuck the two ones together stuck, um the middle one to the to the other end where the other ones are, ending and then, the um, moved another one onto the top and the bottom and then, and then, it was and then it was and then he just had to put another layer on top ... and he had to varnish it (Claire). Um, no they don't. They only sit around and eat tea (Grace). [Mummy] Do some jobs. Around the walls she ... painted. Make sandwiches ... cuddles and kisses and, watches videos at the same time (Sarah).	She does the washing and she sometimes makes porridge. She makes cakes and I help her make them, I put the butter in (Regan). He works in the nursery and sells plants at the markets (Regan). She does the shopping (Jessica). He makes the fire (Jessica). She makes cakes and food for catering and she makes my bed (Erin). He cleans the swimming pool (Erin). I don't know! [long pause] She does the washing up and gardening. At work she looks after sick people (James). He just works. He sometimes works on his trainer, it has wheels, they move but you can't ride anywhere (James). She usually cleans the house. She dresses me. She goes to her work and looks after people there (Lauren). He usually is exhausted from his work and he lies down on the sofa and watches TV (Lauren).

making. Categories that emerged included: sewing, cooking, painting, lunch preparation, assembling of shelves, house cleaning, shopping, playing, washing, firewood collecting, and gardening. This finding is not unexpected. Most responses related to the maintenance of the home and family, with children participating in most events.

An analysis of children's making activities in terms of materials, information, and systems indicates that two-thirds of all responses given related to making with materials (particularly food). The other third of responses indicated that children are involved in or observe activities that include systems such as routines and garden watering processes. Comments regarding designing, making, and appraising with information technologies such as TV, letter writing, radio, computers, books, or audio tapes, were heard less frequently. These areas were considered by children when asked about their routines. However, when children were asked to comment on making activities, these areas rarely featured. It would seem that information technologies were more associated with passive viewing or receiving and not active designing, making, and appraising. For example, the children did not talk about constructing their own audio tapes (for stories, singing, etc). Once again this was not an unexpected finding. However, it does highlight the need for curriculum developers and teachers to be aware that the use of information technologies needs to be reconsidered by children—from passive to active use.

Children's understandings and experiences of appraisal of processes and products were also sought during the interviews on making. However, the children did not volunteer information regarding this area. Although appraisal was regarded as equally important to making and planning in the study, the appraisal activities were not actively pursued during interviews, as children were not aware at a metacognitive level what appraisal meant. Further exploratory work is needed to develop an interview context that encourages children's understandings of appraisal to be expressed, for example using photographs of familiar play spaces and asking children to comment on the appropriateness of the play venue.

CONCLUSION

In this study, 12 case-study examples of children's planning/designing, making, and appraising (DMA) experiences in the home were presented. Although a small sample size, this exploratory study has highlighted that children's experiences of DMA are considerable, with most design (planning) occurring orally and only some two-dimensional activity taking place (such as writing a shopping list).

As would be expected it was also found that a great deal of making activities occur in the home, predominantly focused on people and home maintenance. Most making activities related to materials, with least in the area of information. Appraisal type comments were not forthcoming during interviews. This aspect of the study was inconclusive since it was difficult to ask children questions about the area.

What is interesting to note is the mismatch between curriculum planning emphases in technology education and very young children's home experiences. Given the predominance of making and oral planning experiences of young children, more attention by curriculum developers needs to be given to helping children engage in two- and three-dimensional planning/designing (and possibly explicit discussion of appraisal). Children's experiences in this area are minimal and hence many free-play opportunities (and teaching modelling) of two- and three-dimensional planing/designing is necessary if children are to feel successful in DMA with materials, information, and systems.

As with other curriculum areas, it is important to understand, acknowledge, and build upon children's experiences. This exploratory study demonstrates the need for teachers to recognise their oral planning experiences and emphasise two- and three-dimensional planning experiences (and possibly appraisal) in their programs. This study represents the beginning point of finding out about children's home experiences in DMA. Further work into this area is urgently needed.

NOTES

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For more details of this research see:

Fleer, M. (1966). Investigating young children's home technological language and experience. *Journal for Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, 1*, 29–46.

That people have different perceptions of technology education is noted by:

Hardy, T. (1992). Adult experiences of science and technology in everyday life: Some educational implications. *Research in Science Education, 22*, 178–187.

Rennie, L. J. (1987). Teachers' and pupils' perceptions of technology and the implications for curriculum. *Research in Science and Technology Education, 5* (2), 121–133.

Rennie, L. & Jarvis. T. (in press). Measuring children's perceptions about technology. *International Journal of Science Education.*

Studies demonstrating that teachers and children tend to overlook simple technologies and technological processes when considering "technology" include:

Rennie (1987), *see* above.

Rennie & Jarvis (in press), *see* above.

Symington, D. J. (1987). Technology in the primary school curriculum: Teacher ideas. *Research in Science and Technology Education, 5*(2), 167–172.

For various definitions of technology see:

Gardner, P. L. (1992). The application of science to technology. *Research in Science Education, 22*, 140–148.

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Technology as a process is described by:

Gilbert, C. (1990). *Look, primary technology*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.

Technology curriculum documents include:

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That children from Western cultures draw from a front view perspective is from:

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Anau Ako Pasifika

A HOME-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS FAMILIES IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

DIANE MARA
NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The Anau Ako Pasifika project is a home-based early childhood intervention programme which was developed in collaboration with the Bernard van Leer Foundation—an international philanthropic trust based in The Hague, Netherlands, which funds low cost community-based initiatives in early childhood care and education for socially and culturally disadvantaged children.

During the latter part of 1986 a working group was set up in the Department of Education. Eti Laufiso (Pacific Islands Education Officer), James Irving (Research and Statistics), Rosemary Renwick (Early Childhood Division), and myself (Women's Officer, Maori and Island Education), were requested to draft a proposal to support an "Intervention Programme in Early Childhood Education for Pacific Island Communities in New Zealand." It was completed in December 1986 and forwarded to the Bernard van Leer Foundation. This first proposal set out the necessary background and a broad outline for a programme which would address the social, economic, and educational disadvantages faced by Pacific Islanders in New Zealand as we described them.

Population profiles presented in the proposal revealed that a significant group (43 percent) of the total Pacific Islands population were less than 16 years of age. Unemployment rates quoted from the 1981 Census of Population and Dwellings revealed those Pacific Islands rates, were, even at that time, more than double the overall New Zealand rate. At the time of writing, enrolments of Pacific Islands children in any early childhood institution were low in comparison to Maori or Pakeha (New Zealander of European descent). Figures recorded for four-year-olds were: below 50 percent (Pacific Islands), 60 percent (Maori), and 85 percent (Pakeha). Furthermore, the proposal cited evidence of falling rates of enrolment in early childhood centres amongst Pacific Islands communities.

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It was made clear from the start that the programme would be developed and maintained by the Pacific Islands communities themselves. The two main Pacific Islands organisations who were active in education and represented almost the total range of ethnic communities became partners with the Department of Education in the project. PACIFICA (Pacific Women's Council) and PIPEF (Pacific Islands Polynesian Education Foundation) both wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunities (and the chance for substantial funding) that such a project could provide. During 1987, following the acceptance of the initial proposals by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Department of Education working group and representatives from PIPEF and PACIFICA worked on a more detailed proposal in collaboration with the foundation's own programmes director.

Finally, in 1988, a grant of more than $900,000 was made by the foundation to the project which was now called Anau (family) Ako (learning and teaching) Pasifika ("the Pacific Islands way"). The project name was developed by members of PACIFICA and PIPEF to provide a title which was clearly identifiable as Pacific Islands. It was intended to be as inclusive of as many Pacific Islands languages as possible. *Anau* is Cook Island Maori for "family". *Ako* is both a Niuean and Tongan word which means "focus on learning and teaching", and Pasifika is recognisable by most language groups referring both to our geographical region and our way of doing things.

This home-based project is based in three geographical regions. These were the three indicated in the proposal to be ones of the highest concentration of Pacific Islands populations—Auckland, Wellington, and Tokoroa. The Anau Ako Pasifika project is now administered from its own centre in Turner Street, Tokoroa by the project director, Mrs Teupoko Morgan. She maintains contact and travels regularly to the other project locations.

THE PROGRAMME ITSELF

The main work of the project is carried out by a team of five "home tutors", assisted by a resource officer and a research officer, who are all co-ordinated by the field director. The project director and field team reported to the Anau Ako Pasifika Board of Trustees until July 1991, and since 30 April 1992 reports to the Anau Ako Pasifika Advisory Committee. The national adviser (Pacific Islands) of the Early Childhood Development Unit (ECDU) provided administrative support until June 1996 when the funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation ceased and the Ministry of Education directly contracted the Anau Ako Pasifika Trust to provide its services to Pacific Islands families.

Home tutors in Auckland and Wellington (there are two in each of these cities), and Tokoroa make regular visits to homes of families they know or who are referred to them (Anau Ako Pasifika has worked with more than 2000 Pacific Islands families since 1988). The family agrees to be part of a programme which encourages parent-child interaction in order to assist language development (in particular, first or home languages) and pre-literacy skills; the project supports parents in promoting and enhancing their child's growth and development. Anau Ako Pasifika's aim is ultimately to encourage parents to move out of the home and to make informed choices about their child's education, starting at the early childhood level. That could be attendance at kindergarten, playcentre, daycare, or a Pacific Islands language group.

The underlying philosophy includes an acceptance that parents or caregivers and other relatives are the people who have the greatest influence in the child's early learning experiences and development. The home tutors assure the parents or caregivers they work with that they have important skills and knowledge to pass on to their children, most of all, their mother tongue and the associated cultural values and practices. So the programme is aimed at not only providing positive outcomes for the children, but also at increasing the awareness in parents of their role in their child's education and to support them in their efforts to participate in that process.

The relationships that must be built up between the home tutor and the parents or caregivers are crucial to the success of the programme. Home visits often embrace conversation not only about the children directly, but also about related matters of health, welfare, or budgeting. Where possible a home tutor works with a family from the same ethnic group, for example a Samoan home tutor works with a Samoan family. However, where this cannot be provided, experience in the project has shown that a Pacific Islands tutor from a different cultural background can still successfully encourage parents and work alongside them to develop their skills. The home tutors' knowledge of Pacific Islands networks in their area means that they can access appropriate resource people for the family if this is still necessary.

A key component of the programme is the development of learning and teaching resources which the home tutors take with them into the homes they visit. Initially, they encourage the use of materials that most Pacific Islands families already have in their homes, particularly objects such as shells, seeds, patterned bedspreads and pillowcases, tapa cloth patterns; woven articles such as mats, hats, bags; family photographs; wall hangings; shell ornaments; and many other articles that are part of their everyday background and culture. These resources can be used in many different ways to promote learning for example, matching, seriation, and counting. The home tutors are experienced and trained in the use of not only culturally-based resources but also in the making of low-cost books, puzzles, and the creative use of recyclable materials found in most households.

Home tutors receive a part-time salary plus transport costs and, integral to their work with families, they receive regular staff training and support. These are mainly by the project director, who also involves outside expertise, where appropriate. Training includes the use of monitoring and evaluation techniques because the field team, as a group, is responsible for designing the methodology, collecting the data, and collating the information they receive. It is important to understand its purpose and significance to the implementation of the programme.

ANAU AKO PASIFIKA AND PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS

On initial inspection it would appear that the Anau Ako Pasifika project and the initiative of the previous Minister of Education Dr Lockwood Smith, "Parents As First Teachers" (PAFT), are very similar. Both programmes work from the basic premise that parents and families are the first and foremost educators in a child's life; both use home visiting as an intervention. But that is where the similarities end.

Anau Ako Pasifika was established after a period of community consultation and the development of two proposals based on available research and statistics. It preceded PAFT by two years. Its home-based methodology was similar to other community-initiated early childhood projects around the world that were funded and evaluated by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Leonie Pihama's critique argues that PAFT is framed within positivist constructions of compensatory education which ignore wider cultural and structural considerations. In fact, PAFT espouses "victim-blaming scenarios" which work to maintain structural inequalities and the subordinate positioning of Maori people. Pihama comments upon the ad hoc manner in which PAFT was conceived, how it did not arise from community lobbying, and that its implementation proceeded without consultation of those involved in the early education sector. PAFT as a "compensatory" initiative, argues Pihama, ignores the moves taken by Maori people in the establishment of kohanga reo (Maori language groups for preschool children), and latterly, I argue, Anau Ako Pasifika, established and implemented by Pacific Islands women.

Maori and Pacific Islands communities are both presently targeted recipients of PAFT, however, such an imposed programme, in comparison to kohanga reo and Anau Ako Pasifika, can only ensure these groups remain in a marginalised position in this country.

THE EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

The real significance of Anau Ako Pasifika in its fullest sense is not yet known, but there are a number of achievements and features of the project that have emerged from a recently completed evaluation of the project. One of the most significant results has been evidence for the empowerment of parents; the encouragement they have received to move out into the community with more confidence; the affirmation of parents that they can and do play the key role in their children's development and that they can fulfill that role by the sharing of the languages and cultural skills, knowledge

and resources that they already possess.

Beaumont (1992) reviews studies both here and overseas which show that immigrant languages (Pacific Islands languages fall into this category in Aotearoa/New Zealand) usually die out in three generations unless conscious efforts are made to maintain them. Maintenance and language usage must occur in a number of different contexts, and two key contexts for Pacific Islands languages, according to Beaumont, are firstly in homes with family and friends and secondly, in the Pacific Islands early childhood language groups.

In conjunction with churches, community organisations, and cultural performance groups; contacts and visits to the home country; and opportunities for adults to learn their languages at tertiary level, Pacific Islands communities can ensure their languages survive beyond the three-generation cutoff point. Anau Ako Pasifika, by encouraging parents to use their first language while engaging in play activity, singing, reading, and talking about what they are doing together with their children, is not simply a way of passing on the language itself, but also affirming its importance and relevance as cultural transmission in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The project has already produced some high-quality, brightly coloured, resources such as books, pictures, and jigsaw puzzles which not only use Pacific Islands languages, patterns, and objects but which are educationally appropriate and are welcomed by parents. These specifically-made resources are used in a number of different ways by the home tutors with parents and children. The project is meeting a rapidly growing demand from Pacific Islands early childhood language groups to supply such resources, and interest has even been shown by junior class teachers in primary schools.

THE DISCLOSURE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Home tutors are required to make detailed reports on the successes, the problems, and difficulties they encounter when they visit families in an ongoing way—not only in terms of the programme itself, but also in terms of the difficulties experienced by the families they work with.

The project director has publicly stated that it is her belief that the major factors contributing to the difficulties affecting the Pacific Islands families in the project stem from the negative effects of the New Zealand economy experienced by all families at the lower income levels. Population growth is highest in Pacific Islands communities in comparison to all other ethnic groups in New Zealand and they experience the highest rate of unemployment—23.4 percent as at June 1994.

The home tutors witness daily the resulting loss of "mana" (dignity and social status) and self-esteem when fathers and other family members are unemployed, the effects on them of staying at home for long periods, and how the general well-being of the family is jeopardised by a combination of economic and social alienation.

Whilst the home tutors are in reality employed only to deliver the programme, they are often relied upon to act as mediators, interpreters, and supporters when the family experiences problems with housing, budgeting, schools, physical and mental health, social welfare, child custody issues and so on. Very often home tutors are called upon to initiate coping strategies in order that the family they are working with can then take some control over their lives. Sometimes, only then can they turn their attention to the intended reason for home visiting.

Home tutors are consequently constantly required to reappraise their daily programme in response to unexpected family crises. They also visit families who cannot afford to own a telephone, who are isolated, and for whom the home tutor may be the only confidante. Home tutors are paid for a working week of 20 hours, they often have a second job to earn a living wage, so balancing another work commitment, while meeting the particular demands of Anau Ako Pasifika which cannot be strictly confined within those 20 hours, is difficult. They have their own family and ethnic community links to maintain, yet the support they give to families who are materially and socially on the margins is often crucial.

The project had, through its involvements across the Pacific Islands communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, revealed the economic and social disadvantage our families are experiencing. The home tutors in the Anau Ako Pasifika project are working extremely hard to meet the educational and social needs of Pacific Islands families and this has occurred between 1988 and June 1996 without any government funding. An overseas philanthropic trust, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, has been instrumental in helping Pacific Islands women in New Zealand show the rest of society how effectively, efficiently, and appropriately they can work within their communities to meet their own social and educational needs.

ADVOCACY OF THE PROJECT

It is fitting that the New Zealand government should now take on responsibility of funding the Anau Ako Pasifika project, since it is a programme targeting a section of our community with low and limited levels of educational achievement and qualifications. The recognition by government and education officials of its importance has only been gained through the efforts of the project, its funding agency and some key Pacific Islands community leaders.

Throughout the project, the field director, Mrs Teupoko Morgan, and the home tutors have viewed themselves as advocates of the programme wherever they may be—at community meetings, education group meetings, workshops, or conferences—they have taken as many opportunities as possible to discuss and promote their work. The commercial production of a video about the origins and work of the project in 1993 has assisted the promotion of its work to educational and community groups. Anau Ako Pasifika has found a unique place in the early childhood education sector. Since 1988 Teupoko Morgan has met with the Minister and Associate Ministers of Education and the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs to brief them about the project. Meetings with Ministry of Education officials have been held to update them on progress and development.

Such ongoing advocacy and lobbying, and the strict maintenance of monitoring and evaluation by the project staff, meant that Anau Ako Pasifika was in a very strong position when funding became available in 1996 through a government employment initiative called "Vaka Ou". Officials from Pacific Island Affairs, and the Ministries of Labour and Education were able to immediately suggest a Pacific Islands community-based initiative which was achieving success with families affected by unemployment and a lack of access to resources and services.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The evaluation report and its findings endorses the principle that families play a crucial role in the development and learning of children, and, as such must be appropriately supported and resourced for their unique and crucial roles. The project demonstrates that with appropriate personnel, methodology, ongoing monitoring, and focused resourcing within distinct cultural frameworks, parents can be empowered to fully participate in the educational processes and educational choices with and on behalf of their children.

Almost all parents surveyed (85 percent) reported that they had received support and friendship from the home tutor, help with their child's learning, and help in the making and use of learning resources. In addition, they mentioned how the home tutor had helped them to understand and communicate with their child. Forty percent of parents thought that participation in the project had improved family communication; the same proportion acknowledged the support by the home tutor which in many ways countered social and cultural isolation for many families.

In answer to the question "How has Anau Ako Pasifika helped you as a parent?", researchers found that more than one-third of the parents sampled refrained from responding about themselves, but talked at length about their children and the gains they had made through being in the project so obviously they were able and more confident about discussing their children's development. Forty-seven percent of the parents reported that they felt more confident now to participate in their children's learning by talking, reading to and with them, by making and using learning resources. More than 20 percent said that they knew now how to reason with their children, to praise them, and to talk with them (including in their own first languages).

In terms of the children themselves, the parents surveyed reported an improvement in their social skills such as relating positively to other children, greater use of resources and equipment in playing and learning. More than one-third of the parents sampled mentioned the improvement in literacy and preliteracy skills with books, stories, and music. Language skills including listening, speaking (in their first or home language), and asking questions had been extended during their time with the Anau Ako Pasifika project. The increase in questioning by the preschool Pacific Islands children is an interesting aspect of the study since many of the parents themselves were not encouraged as toddlers to ask questions. However, some Pacific Islands parents are beginning to realise that in order to succeed in the New Zealand education system students must become skilled in asking questions. They are also accepting that questioning by children is not necessarily disrespectful.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Anau Ako Pasifika project is currently (since July 1996) being funded directly from the Ministry of Education through a contract with the Anau Ako Pasifika Trust. Due to funding levels, the field team is only able to continue its present work with Pacific Islands families in Auckland, Tokoroa, and Wellington, despite calls for expansion to other areas in New Zealand.

The project's development and distribution of resources continue to meet the growing needs of parents and Pacific Islands early childhood language groups for culturally-appropriate learning materials. This part of their operation helps Anau Ako Pasifika to generate some extra income for its administration and further resource development.

In addition to its educational development role, Anau Ako Pasifika has played a pivotal role in the development of a national education policy for Pacific Islands communities in New Zealand. The Ministry of Education launched its policy framework at the end of 1996, embracing early childhood, school, and post-compulsory training goals for Pacific Islands students, naming Anau Ako Pasifika and the licensing and chartering of Pacific Islands early childhood language groups as priority projects.

It remains to be seen whether sufficient funding can be accessed, not only to sustain these programmes, but to extend them into the future so that more Pacific Islands families and children can benefit from them. Unless this occurs, Pacific Islands parents and children will remain, for the most part educationally, economically and socially marginalised. Whilst that situation endures, our society cannot truly describe itself as one which values the needs of children and their families.

NOTES

DIANE MARA, of part Tahitian descent, is currently a researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Previously she was a lecturer in education at the Auckland College of Education.

This article was developed from a chapter in her thesis:

Mara, D. (1995). *Te puai no te vahine: Pacific Islands education policy and education initiatives in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A critique.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland.

For further details on the methodology of the research see:

Mara, D. (1995). *The cultural impact and effect on project evaluation.* Paper presented to the Australasian Bernard van Leer Foundation Network Meeting, 13–19 August, Rotorua, New Zealand.

The falling rates of enrolment in early childhood centres amongst Pacific Islands communities was noted in:

Proposal for consideration by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to support an intervention programme in early childhood education for Pacific Islands communities in New Zealand (1986). (Available from Diane Mara, c/- New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P O Box 3237, Wellington.

The definition of Anau Ako Pasifika is noted in:

Anau Ako Pasifika. (1993). *Workplan for Phase II 1st July 1993–30 June 1996.* Tokoroa, New Zealand.

That PAFT is framed within positivist constructions of compensatory education, is noted in:

Pihama, L. (1993). *Tungia te ururua whakaritorito, te tupu o te harakeke: A critical analysis of Parents As First Teachers.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland.

For an evaluation of the Anau Ako Pasifika project see:

Mara, D., Morgan, T., Lund, L., Robertson, P., Watts, M., Enoka, N., & Lemisio, S. (1996). *Evaluation report of the Anau Ako Pasifika project.* Tokoroa, New Zealand: Anau Ako Pasifika Trust. (Available from the Anau Ako Pasifika Centre, 12 Turner Place, Tokoroa.)

That Pacific Island languages are likely to die out in three generations is noted by:

Beaumont, C. (1992). *Assisting the maintenance of Pacific languages in New Zealand.* Paper presented to Third National Conference on Community Languages and English Speakers of Other Languages, Auckland.

The priority given to Anau Ako Pasifica and Pacific Island language groups is noted in:

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Pacific Islands education, Update 16: A report on Pacific Islands Education in Aotearoa.* Wellington: Author.

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Good practice to best practice:
Extending policies and children's minds

ANNE MEADE • NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Introduction

This paper looks at good policy and practice at government level, at the professionalisation of the early childhood sector, as well as at best practice in early childhood education settings.

The metaphor of a web is used to argue that a web of influence has been, and can be, spun. Information technology has realised the power of webs—just think of the phenomenal growth in the World Wide Web. Early childhood webs of influence must be enacted now to make a difference for society in the 21st century. In Ingrid Pramling's words, "... tomorrow we have already lost a generation ...".

In New Zealand united networks or webs have influenced changes for young children, for the better. Three types of world-wide webs are being spun:

- in the increasing numbers of conferences on early childhood education (*political webs*);
- in the trends towards professionalisation of early childhood education (*professional webs*); and
- in the themes in scholarly writing about young children's learning (*webs of scholars*).

At the level of the state, this paper argues that positive changes in early childhood education policy in New Zealand in the late 1980s were, in large measure, the result of enough people coming together to speak with one voice for the sector. At the level of children learning, two webs of influence are important: professional webs and webs of scholars influencing teachers' daily practice.

All three webs are connected. My vision for the 21st century is that early childhood teachers will realise the potential of early childhood education for children. When more teachers become thinking teachers (reflective practitioners) who focus on the education of children, children's learning will be better supported and extended. As that happens, I believe community and political support will increase, and appropriate policies will be more easily enacted.

How important is best practice in early childhood education in influencing good policy at the macro level? My thesis is that it is very important.

New Zealand early childhood education: A case study of good practice in policy

During this century, New Zealand preschool education has enjoyed wide and increasing community support, as well as increasing state support. Support for childcare centres has been more ambivalent, with state support being agreed relatively late in the century—1973. The field has been characterised by its community base with state support, its tendency to respond to social change by establishing new types of services (rather than adapting existing services), and, therefore, its diversity. Growth has been continuous, with some limits set by successive governments on the growth of kindergartens as they received the highest level of funding from government. Participation rates are high, especially as children near the school starting age (which is usually on their fifth birthday, although the compulsory age is six).

By 1985, as a result of several conferences and working groups during the previous decade, a reasonable consensus as to the agenda for policy change had developed within the early childhood constituency in New Zealand by 1985. The Minister of Education at that time convened a consultative forum to hear that agenda from the "horse's mouth", so to speak. The consensus amongst diverse groups was powerfully evident. Effective political webs were being spun, to the advantage of *all* early childhood education.

Significant policy advances

In 1986, two main recommendations were acted upon:

- the administration of childcare services was transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education in 1986, that is, the Department of Education assumed responsibility for the care and education of children from their infancy;
- the state colleges of education provided only integrated training for childcare workers and kindergarten teachers, regardless of their place of work after graduation, with implementation of the courses being phased in from 1988 onwards.

These changes caused the "wall" dividing care and education at government level to start tumbling down. It did not take the union movement long to realise they could contribute to the integration of the sector by combining the kindergarten and childcare unions. Further government policy changes effecting the integration of care and education services occurred as part of what are known in New Zealand as the Before Five policies.

Generic terms, such as the early childhood sector and early childhood services, now cover all services which provide care and education for young children. These developments were significant for the children, their families, and their teachers. The services covered by the generic terms and equitable policies include:

- kindergartens,
- playcentres (parent co-operative early childhood centres),
- childcare centres (be they private, employer-assisted, community-based, or early childhood centres attached to tertiary institutions, be they sessional or full-day),
- home-based services (for example, family day care),
- Montessori centres, and
- language-immersion centres (for example, kohanga reo for indigenous Maori people, or Pacific Island early childhood centres for different Pacific Island communities).

Before Five policies

The Government policy package, the Before Five policies, which was announced at the beginning of 1989, had its genesis in the recommendations of a working group on early childhood care and education convened in 1988. The recommendations of the Meade working group on early childhood care and education were published as *Education to Be More* (1988).

Three members of the working party had in-depth knowledge of the sector, particularly of all the relevant working parties and conferences where a growing consensus about policy directions for early childhood care and education had developed. While the working group needed to work within its terms of reference, many of the answers to the questions had already been formulated in preceding discussions amongst providers, unions, teacher educators, and scholars. Moreover, there was an overarching principle guiding the group's deliberations—to maintain the integration of education and care, while preserving the diversity of services. New Zealanders accepted that each type of early childhood service had valued features which needed to be preserved providing that quality was maintained. Therefore, equity, not uniformity, was sought by the constituency, by parents, and by government. These factors made it possible to arrive at a coherent set of policy recommendations. These recommendations were welcomed by most in the constituency (private providers objected to some of them), and accepted with a few exceptions by the Cabinet.

The Before Five policies which resulted were:

1. *Chartered early childhood services receive bulk funds.* Services which operate quality standards receive a Government grant-in-aid per child per hour. There is a cap of 30 hours per week which can be claimed per child.
2. *Low-income families can claim a fees subsidy for childcare services from the Department of Social Welfare.*
3. *Discretionary grants for establishing non-profit services* are available from the Government. There is a finite amount in this pool each year.
4. *Charters are negotiated with the Ministry of Education,* following official guidelines. Approval that the minimum standards laid down in regulations are being met (licence approval) also rests with the Ministry.
5. *Services without charters must be licensed.* There are two universally-applied sets of licensing standards—one set for centres and another for home-based services. Some of the services without charters may receive a lower grant-in-aid from Government.
6. *Bulk-funded chartered services are accountable* for meeting their charter objectives and for the responsible spending of Government funds, via regular signed returns being sent to the Ministry of Education, and via review visits from the Education Review Office each year.
7. *Early childhood services continue under the same management structures they had.*
8. *An Early Childhood Development Unit has been established* to assist with the development of services; provide advisory support and professional development courses to existing services; act as a co-ordination or liaison agent; and, latterly, to co-ordinate the Parents as First Teachers service.
9. *The Special Education Service now provides Government-funded specialist advice and support* to early childhood services and parents of children with special educational needs.
10. *Registration of early childhood teachers with a Diploma of Teaching (ECE)* occurs on the same basis as any other teacher who meets the registration criteria.

Comments on the Before Five policies

Note, first, the lack of differentiation between childcare and education services—all *services* are treated as early childhood education services, although only some *users* can claim fees subsidies from Social Welfare—users of childcare services, kohanga reo, and family day care (when used for longer-than-sessional hours). Note also, no service type was favoured ahead of others and no age group missed out in the Before Five policies.

The policies were announced before the funding levels were determined, so staff, parents, and committees spent the first months of 1989 campaigning for adequate levels of funding. The Budget announced that the rate per preschooler per hour was to progressively increase per year, levelling out in 1995, and that infants and toddlers would attract a higher grant-in-aid right from the introduction of bulk funding. The increases were significant for those services which, up until 1990, had had less support from the Government. No provider received less than it had had, and the grants were paid to the provider—as always.

The policies followed (with a few exceptions) the recommendations of the Meade working group on early childhood care and education which were based heavily on a consensus which had been woven together by the constituency at conferences and working parties from 1975 (the United Nations International Year for Women).

This agreement with what those in the field were seeking, in itself, may seem remarkable given the growing tendency of governments to regard constituency views with suspicion, arguing "provider capture".

Extension of state provisions at a time when the Western world was retreating from Welfare State provision was also remarkable. The extension was in the structures—the establishment of the Early Childhood Development Unit, and reallocation of resources in the Special Education Service to increase services for children under school age—as well as in funding. Government expenditure increased by 125 percent the year the new funding was introduced, and has doubled since that date as a result of expansion. This happened in a period of great economic constraint. One explanation for the expansion of State involvement is that a lot has been the result of the "web of influence" of the early childhood sector and others with an interest in early childhood education *uniting* to communicate a consensus view to politicians.

In the recommendations about charters, the Meade working group indicated that curriculum aims and objectives should be developed as part of charter arrangements. No progress was made on this recommendation prior to the Before Five policies being released, but the development of a national curriculum framework did occur in 1992–1993, and became official in 1996.

The early childhood services, generally speaking, welcomed the Government policy and the improved funding. The comprehensive nature of the policies, the level of harmony of the policies with constituency's views, and the fit with the revised education administrative structures were appreciated. There was criticism about the amount of time needed for each service to formulate its charter objectives in consultation with its parent community, although this criticism was not politicised in the way the funding issue was.

What has happened in the interim?

Within weeks of the skeletal policies being formulated, a series of six working groups comprising officials, managers, and teachers were set up to advise Government on implementation details. Thus, Government legitimised "webs of influence" although it did exert some influence itself by selecting many of the spinners of those particular webs and determining their terms of reference.

The Labour Government again won favour in 1990 for finalising a related policy for the qualifications and training which would be required for charters and bulk funding for all services, with some variations to fit community services which offered their own training courses; for example, the playcentre movement. A phased implementation plan was announced. Extra funding was made available for staff to upgrade their qualifications to a Diploma of Teaching (ECE), including primary teachers if they wanted to be accredited as early childhood teachers. Centres were buzzing with professional talk and learning, although supervisors and head teachers were feeling decidedly over-worked.

Worthwhile pay increases were awarded to childcare staff in the 1990 wage round. Expansion of support services for early childhood services became noticeable within a year. On the negative side, concerns were becoming evident about the way officials were implementing some of the policies; for example, non early childhood reviewers were making worrying errors of judgment when reviewing early childhood services.

At the end of 1990, New Zealanders elected a conservative government. This marked the start of some unravelling of the comprehensiveness and coherence of the policies. Within months, legislation was passed to try to allow kindergartens to charge fees, the increased funding which was to extend to the mid 1990s was stalled, and the phased implementation of the improved qualifications requirement was, in effect, aborted. As well, charter guidelines were transformed from a developmental model to a control model. Later, the Government stopped paying kindergarten teachers from a central payroll system, and devolved salaries funding to regional voluntary committees. It also put the advisory support function of the Early Childhood Development Unit out to tender! All such decisions were made "behind closed doors".

Development of curriculum guidelines for early childhood services

The one major positive policy change of the 1990s has been the development of a curriculum framework for early childhood education. Early childhood education experts led a consultative process starting with Maori people formulating the basics for kohanga reo (Maori "language nests" or preschool education centres) and other programmes, *prior to* the rest of the guidelines being developed.

Good policy practice by governments

The preceding analyses—of the New Zealand situation at the time the Before Five policies were formulated, of the erosion story, and of the development of the curriculum guidelines for New Zealand early childhood education—lead to the following views about good policy practice.

First, it is important that governments (state and local) agree on a coherent set of values when shaping policy.

In the New Zealand experience, the Meade working group on early childhood care and education was given a set of operating principles by the Cabinet, and added some of their own (many of which were already evident in the terms of reference).

The Cabinet "givens" in forming a values base were:

- implementing the Treaty of Waitangi (the constitutional agreement between the Crown and the indigenous Maori people);
- improving the social and economic status of women;
- enhancing the family unit in New Zealand society;
- providing a legislative environment which safeguards basic human rights and freedoms, and works towards the removal of discrimination.

The principles the working group set themselves were:

- flexibility and diversity in early childhood care and education;
- community involvement in decision making, in resource allocation, and in accountability procedures;
- responsiveness to consumer needs;
- maximum accessibility to services;
- increased affordability of services;
- promotion of the rights of children and families.

Second, another important foundation for effective policy is the early formulation of a clear picture of the respective roles of Government and other interested parties. The areas of Government responsibility identified by the working group, and largely taken into the Before Five policies, were:

- helping with the costs of providing early childhood care and education services (note we did not talk about direct provision or paying full costs);
- providing the legislative framework for setting standards;
- meeting the costs of training staff;
- providing an adequate advisory structure to support providers and monitor standards;
- acceptance of a facilitating role within the community to encourage services to adapt to change, and to help new providers get established;
- ensuring appropriate and adequately resourced early childhood services are provided for Maori people (a Treaty of Waitangi responsibility); and
- planning for the provision of early childhood care and education.

The Labour Government must have agreed with these, given its acceptance of most of the recommendations.

Seven years on, these are still the appropriate areas of government (state and/or local) responsibility. Current issues which are causing those in the political web in New Zealand to push for policy change are areas where the policy has unravelled and Government is no longer fulfilling the responsibilities set out above:

- funding to make services accessible and affordable;
- training and qualifications of early childhood teachers;
- advisory and monitoring structures.

The third point about policy development is that co-operation between the State, providers, the profession, and the community in formulating policies is more likely to achieve both "settlement" and policies which support best practice by teachers than behind-closed-doors policy formulation. The most powerful example is the open and collaborative approach taken by those who drafted the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, in 1992–93. Positive change can occur if the political webs are open.

Shaping the discourse

Finally, before discussing best practice by early childhood teachers, it is relevant to comment on some linguistic shifts. Prior to the policy change in New Zealand to integrate the different types of services under one umbrella, there used to be two generic terms used by officials and in the community: "childcare" and "preschool education". During the transition years, when integration was bedding down, the generic term was "early childhood care and education". Now, most people in the sector use the terms "early childhood *education*" and "early childhood teachers". (The community is still catching up.) This is symbolically important—at the macro level, and in the settings where young children are learning. Those in the political web have been clear for years that the discourse about policies must be focused on *educational* purposes and benefits. Children have gained from this.

The professional web

Now to the second web which focuses on early childhood workers as professionals, involved with "best practice" in early childhood education.

It is important to acknowledge the excellent summary of good practice provided in the *Start Right* report. The 12 fundamental principles and the 10 requirements of good practice are ones which are well supported by research and by reflective practitioners. The view expressed about the high level of professional practice needed by "teachers and carers" is also known and accepted as crucial by experts in the field. Here, then, is an example of the influence of international webs of professionals and scholars.

There are also important professional developments around the world, including:

- codes of ethics for early childhood professionals (formulated in the United States, in Australia, and in New Zealand);
- quality assurance systems, such as accreditation, often being initiated by workers, (the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) introduced accreditation in the United States, and the Combined Trade Unions were very significant in the establishment of National Childcare Accreditation in Australia);
- curriculum guidelines which are based on developmental principles such as the 12 fundamental principles espoused in the *Start Right* report (also, NAEYC in the United States, the Early Years Curriculum Group in England, and *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand); and
- training and qualifications systems to enable staff progressively to become adequately equipped for the challenges of their profession (under development in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand).

How is the factor of parent-teacher partnership—known to make a positive difference for children—faring in these recent developments emphasising the early childhood educator as a professional? How do we transform and yet maintain this partnership within the context of a growing professionalisation of early educators? This is an area needing attention in New Zealand.

One other development for practitioners, which should be on this list of professional practice guidelines, codes, and policies, is the continued development of *advisory services*. However, there is an erosion of these services in New Zealand (now put out to tender annually), and in England and Wales as a consequence of changes to Local Education Authorities (LEAs). One wonders what is happening in other countries? Can the professional web act in this domain to limit the erosion, or better still, strengthen advisory services?

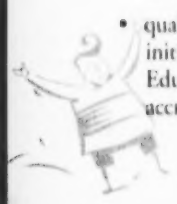
These developments, usually arising from activity in the professional webs, are also important foundation variables for the best teaching practices. Research is telling us that early childhood teachers need to be professionals if quality early childhood education is to have positive outcomes for children and their families. They need to be well equipped for the enormous responsibility they carry for children, and for society.

The web of scholars

We now turn to a challenge laid down by the third web—the web of scholars which is seeking "warm demanders … who are equipped to capture the unreturning moment." The following section focuses primarily on the "warm demanders" part of the quote (from the *Start Right* report (1994), albeit from pages separated from one another) because it requires teachers to change habits of a lifetime—always hard to effect. Without such changes of habits, teachers will not optimise those teachable moments. And without the teachers being equipped to capture those moments in ways appropriate to the how young children learn, the teachers won't optimise those teachable moments either.

Warm demanders

We are used to the notion that early childhood teachers should be warm and responsive, but we are not so used to the idea that they should also be "demanders". Vygotsky has challenged teachers of young children to be "demanders", but the acceptance of his theory by practitioners and their bringing it into practice has been slow and spasmodic in the English-speaking world. However, a web of early childhood scholars in the English-speaking parts of the world is increasingly articulating his views. If this web of scholars does influence early childhood education



practice in a significant way, it will clinch the professionalisation of teachers. Teachers will increasingly see themselves as people who have warmth as well as being associated with challenging practice that produces good intellectual outcomes for children.

The shift being sought can be summarised as being from "eduction" to "education". The former, "educe", better describes the way most practitioners operate a child-centred curriculum than the latter, "education". "Educe" can be defined as "to bring out, develop, from latent or potential existence", whereas the verb "educate" is defined as "to bring up; give intellectual and moral training to; train ... a physical or mental faculty, to do". For all other age groups, there is acceptance that "to give intellectual and moral training, to train a physical or mental faculty to do" requires completion of professional training courses. In the early childhood sector in some countries, there is still a struggle to gain acceptance for this policy.

Many early childhood practitioners themselves collude in this view. They don't seek comprehensive training, and even when trained and qualified they may not call themselves teachers. In New Zealand, many teachers who meet the criteria to register with the Teacher Registration Board do not do so, although they will at least accept the webs of professionals and scholars labelling them as "teachers" without questioning the label. In other countries, a much smaller fraction of the staff in the sector are allowed by their peers and by system to call themselves teachers. The argument is that if society expects early childhood practitioners to educate, then those faced with this expectation should be trained and recognised as teachers—no matter which type of service employs them and without occupational differentiation.

When teaching early childhood education at a university, at the beginning of each course I used to ask the class members to stand on a continuum indicating how much direct intervention was required by adults working with young children to facilitate their learning. Most clustered below the mid-point of the continuum towards the non-intervention end. However, when I asked them to re-configure their human sculpture according to type of learning, some interesting differences emerged. When referring to the learning of social and cultural knowledge and behaviour, the class members shifted towards the intervention end of the continuum. When referring to learning related to early literacy, early mathematics and reasoning, the large majority (especially those who had experience within the sector) opted for children to learn about these via play and they stood on the continuum toward the less-adult-intervention end. The pattern was consistent year after year.

Adults' behaviour in early childhood settings is consistent with the university class members' indications. Early childhood staff do explicitly teach when giving "moral training", that is, when passing on cultural meanings and behaviours. Think about the passing on of rules about food, about hitting, about sharing. This teaching normally occurs at the "unreturnable moment"—we don't save it until mat time, although some reinforcement of the cultural knowledge may happen then. By way of contrast, staff do stand back when children are engaged in play related to their intellectual development. By teachers standing back too far and too often from children's thinking, we miss the "unreturnable moments" for language extension and supporting and extending their cognition.

The web of scholars is indicating that early childhood teachers need to become "warm demanders" in the domain of children's intellectual development. Put another way, they are recommending that teachers do more than they have been "to train [children's] mental faculty to do".

Let me be clear that Vygotsky and other scholars (myself included) are not advocating a pedagogical approach dominated by teacher-initiated instruction, although some direction has its place from time to time. The change being advocated asks that teachers who have used child-centred pedagogical approaches revise their role, not adopt a new role. The revised role involves teachers:

- doing more observations and assessment of children,
- giving more thought to what children are thinking,
- planning curriculum content and processes to "capture [those] unreturnable moments",
- implementing their curriculum plans,
- having more content knowledge or being willing to learn it with the children, and
- "demanding" more of children during the children's explorations to develop theories of how the world works.

In sum, the web of scholars is asking teachers to improve the scaffolding for children's play, to help them learn in order that they may develop. The web has as one of its premises that "learning drives development rather than development drives learning...".

Child development versus preparation for school

Sometime in past decades, scholars in particular fell into two schools of thought. Staff in early childhood centres either facilitated child development, *or* they prepared children for school (by teaching reading and giving direct instruction). Ingrid Pramling implies that the source of this division may have come from the division of research scholars studying care and education of young children. Studies have mostly been done within the field of developmental psychology and, to a lesser extent, within the field of education (which has mostly focused on school children).

Pramling's arguments describe the origins of the existing practitioner habits, especially the habits associated with eduction. Her statements also set the scene for describing the paradigm shift which I believe has occurred in the web of early childhood scholars. At a UNESCO conference in 1992, Pramling said:

> Education is traditionally viewed as an outside influence, while development is based on a biological view. Child development observes what the child does or is capable of doing, while education observes the potential of the child or how he or she can change....
>
> It is interesting that these two predominant fields of research maintain their perspective also when applied within early childhood education, although many theories today claim that it is more or less impossible to distinguish learning from development....
>
> There are two main perspectives within the field of early childhood education. The first one focuses on children's development as an internally driven process. The most important means here is children's play. And play is here looked upon as the

> child's way of processing his [sic] experiences.... Taking this perspective in an early childhood programme often means having goals for the child, such as becoming secure, learning to communicate, to cooperate, to be creative, and so on.
>
> In other words, goals which are difficult to reject but almost impossible to evaluate.... This means that the child needs someone who cares for him [sic] and who arranges an environment within which the child can be active. I think this is a loophole for our own field. If we accept it, we do not need teachers to work with young children, we only need someone who cares for them....
>
> The other perspective is borrowed from the general school system and focuses on learning. Children's learning is viewed as a transference of skills and knowledge from outside. Traditionally, academic skills are supposed to be learned by practising and working on them.... This means the teacher is given a central role by being the one who structures tasks for the child to work on.... The aim in this approach to learning is often that children learn academic skills, like the alphabet, numbers and counting procedures, facts, etc.

There is a growing concern amongst research scholars that staff operating from the first perspective (that is, that children's development is internally driven) are not doing enough to facilitate children's learning and thinking. There is little evidence that this concern has influenced practice yet, at least in New Zealand.

On the other hand, increasingly, early childhood specialist researchers and childhood teachers have been warning against school models of early childhood education where the aim is to transfer knowledge by group methods. Fortunately countries which had adopted it are shifting their perspective. An example is Poland. However, there is concern that the recent announcements related to a voucher system of funding early years education in England and Wales indicates that the policy will allow vouchers to be used for children starting school at age four. Who was(n't) listening to the scholars? Research indicates that there is no return on investment in children starting school early. The teaching approach (school model) is usually not developmentally appropriate. Generally speaking, a school-model pedagogical approach does not place sufficient emphasis on children constructing their own knowledge and understanding.

Taking children a stage further

A paradigm shift amongst scholars has clearly emerged. Scholars in the web stimulated by Vygotskian or other related theories about children thinking and learning include: Athey, Bruner, Katz, Meade, Nutbrown, Pascal, Pramling, Smith, Sylva, and Wilde Astington. The shift in these scholars' writing has been away from the two polar perspectives described by Pramling, and towards a view which is succinctly described in this quote:

> ... [children must] participate in creating knowledge, and to think out for themselves 'methods' of gaining and constructing it.... (Korczak, 1993)

This statement indicates that not only do children create knowledge but at the same time they are creating a theory of how the mind can gain and construct knowledge. These layers of intellectual activity are a very real part of young children's lives when they are attending early childhood services. The role of teachers operating within a Vygotskian perspective is about "taking children a stage further forward from where they were ...", that is, being the "warm demanders" talked about in the *Start Right* report.

Nutbrown (1994) explains:

> [Vygotsky] suggested that children had two developmental levels, their actual developmental level, what they could actually do independently, and a higher level, that which they may next be able to do. Vygotsky identified the interchange between these two levels as the "zone of proximal development", the difference between what children can do alone and what they can do with help, support and guidance. He argues: "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.87). This notion emphasises the important role of the adult in fostering progression in children's thinking; helping children to move forward in, and develop their ideas through, positive and interactive learning encounters between children and adults....

Here is a very clear description of how a "warm demander" behaves. In New Zealand, most early childhood teachers run child-centred programmes. Toddlers and young children learning through play and actions in which they are actively involved is taken as an indication of good adult practice. However, *on its own*, this type of children's behaviour is not necessarily an indication of best teaching practice.

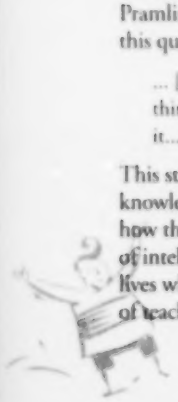
This paper argues that if early childhood teachers are to educate, not simply educe, they need to do more than "arrange an environment within which the child can be active ...". Otherwise they will be falling short of being professional *teachers*. It is this higher standard of practice that the web of scholars is advocating and which the professional web should be aspiring to if we are to achieve the most positive outcomes for children. If we do, I think we could convince the public and politicians that a year's quality early childhood education is more valuable than a year's schooling. We will need to articulate how and what children learn as a result of best practice, and demonstrate that best practice is widespread. Best practice won't become widespread without the provision of specialist training for early childhood *teachers*.

In *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand curriculum guidelines for early childhood programmes, there are five broad strands: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration.

The first four derive from the developmental perspective. The fifth, exploration, has more to do with an educational perspective, and takes early childhood education toward the view of the early childhood education scholars in the 1990s. "Exploration" includes a goal to do with children "developing working theories for making sense of the living, physical and material worlds". If teachers were to adopt a Vygotskian perspective, they would see it as incumbent on them to tune into the children's thinking and actively help them to develop their capacity to theorise. In other words, teachers would accept that children need help, support, and guidance with their thinking, as well as with the acquisition of practical skills such as tying a shoe-lace.

Extending children's thinking

Observation suggests that teachers are reluctant to accept an interactive role in relation to children's cognitive development, to scaffold their learning about thinking. Research about thinking children shows that even when teachers volunteered to join an



action-research project which aimed to facilitate children's cognitive development, they were more likely to facilitate children's "working theories" by adding in different material and equipment, than to help children by *talking* to them!

The action-research project was part of a large-scale longitudinal study of the influences of early childhood experiences on the development of children's competencies. The whole project is known as the Competent Children project. The action-research component (referred to as the Thinking Children project) focused on 10 children aged between four-and-a-half and five-years-old whose parents and staff at their centre tuned in to their exploration and thinking about mathematics and science-related schemas. The concept of schemas comes from Piaget. Schema development is to do with the formation of cognitive structures. When children are working on understanding specific schemas, what adults see is patterns of repeated behaviour as children come to grips with a particular piece of thought. The pieces of thought (schemas) when clustered with other relevant schemas, contribute to children developing an understanding of a science concept.

In the Thinking Children project, parents and staff undertook observations to ascertain children's interest in specific schemas, with some support and information from an action researcher. Then the teachers implemented low-key curriculum interventions of their own devising to enrich children's understanding of those schemas which were visibly of strong interest to them.

Positive results emerged from the parents' and teachers' efforts to nourish the children's work on schemas. All the average scores for the range of competencies measured to do with cognition were better for the intervention children than for a set of comparison children with similar family backgrounds. What interested the researchers when doing the analysis of the qualitative data about the interventions was that the teachers chose the pathway of *curriculum content* ahead of *curriculum processes* to help the children move forward in their learning. Here was a classic example of early childhood staff operating within the developmental perspective where "arranging the environment" dominated. Research related to our own, such as the Froebel Institute project, found that when the teacher also behaved as a "warm demander" there were very positive outcomes for the children in the medium term, as well as anecdotal evidence which suggests these have been maintained.

In the Thinking Children project, we think it may have been the parents—also informed about schema theory—who may have contributed more of the appropriate language to help extend their children's thinking about schemas; that is, informed parents contributed to the learning processes. This may answer my own earlier rhetorical question about parent-teacher partnerships in an era of increased professionalism.

From good practice to best practice

If teachers are to move forward, from good practice to best practice, their habits based only on the developmental psychology perspective need to change. The new habits need to be those associated with teaching via being "warm demanders". The teachers' curriculum plans need to include ideas about how to facilitate processes at those moments in children's play which are optimum for children to move forward in their learning. Achieving best practice via curriculum content and processes focused on individual children as well as on the group, *and* including parent education about young children's learning, is a challenge that takes appropriate training and years of experience to arrive at. Our policies and professional practices need to support this ideal, or it will seldom happen. More children deserve more.

There is at least one other habit or assumption which needs to change if teachers are to move towards best practice, in my view. It is the assumption that early childhood teachers do not need substantive knowledge of scientific concepts. When children pursue their thinking about schemas through to scientific concepts—such as the concepts of piston action or siphoning—then the adults around them need to have content knowledge of those concepts to help children move on up to their next level of understanding. Notice the statement "When children pursue such thoughts", not "If". Chris Athey's research (1990) demonstrated that as children explore schemas to do with *curves*, for example, they start with circular scribbles, then get fascinated with cores and radials, and later progress to helixes, plane spirals, concentric circles, and multiple loops. Such exploration and learning has laid the cognitive foundations for understanding, *inter alia*, the ways our solar system works. This is but one example. Children are developing an understanding of a very wide range of scientific knowledge while in their preschool years.

If we stop and think about the understanding that four-year-olds must have developed in order to distinguish between a helix and a plane spiral, it is clear that work on these schemas is hard intellectual work. Can children do this thinking if we don't equip them with the language? Are teachers equipped with such language? If not, on-going education of teachers is called for.

Conclusions

With the support of comprehensive, supportive policies, most practitioners when given adequate resources will provide good practice to do with eduction and the socialisation of children. However, to achieve best practice which is educative, there needs to be:

- an extension of policies, especially to do with curriculum appropriate for early childhood programmes and with the training and qualifications of teachers,
- the development of professional codes and practices, and
- changes in habits of those who work with children to raise children's awareness of their mind's activities, that is, a shift to practitioners educating children.

These developments are more likely to be associated with quality early childhood education when they come as a result of different webs of influence in action: the political web, the professional web/s, and the webs of scholars. These webs are and should be interdependent. Policies made without input from professionals and scholars are unlikely to support educational outcomes for children. Teachers cannot provide good practice without the support of policies, including adequate funding. And they cannot know about and provide best practice without professional training and on-going learning supported by research and scholarship.

At the end of the day, it is the children who should indicate—in the present, and in their future—whether these

overlapping webs of influence have produced best practice for their learning. I would hope that the aims we have for children's learning and development will be fulfilled by teaching excellence; namely that their well-being is protected and nurtured; they and their families feel a sense of belonging; they feel their contribution is valued; good communication is promoted and languages are profected; and children learn through active exploration of the environment.

Lilian Katz (1994) has provided sets of indicators about quality early childhood education. Using the indicators related to children's learning, best practice would mean that the children would say at the end of each week:

> The activities and experiences at my day care/nursery/kindergarten/playgroup are engaging, absorbing, and challenging; interesting; meaningful; and satisfying.

And at the end of their preschool years, children will have the cognitive structures in place to understand the basics about all manner of scientific concepts—ranging from friction to capillary action to momentum. Children can understand these concepts, given rich experiences and teachers who are "warm demanders".

Let us all use our webs of influence to ensure that all children are able to give positive answers about the value of their early childhood education. Their heritage will be assured if they can. And so will our heritage. We will not have lost a generation.

NOTES

DR ANNE MEADE is Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

This is edited from the keynote address:

Meade, A. (1995). Good practice to best practice in early childhood education: Extending policies and children's minds. Keynote address at the "Start Right" Conference, London, 20–22 September 1995. *Early childhood education conference papers.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

"Tomorrow we have already lost a generation" is from page 47 of:

Pramling, I. (1992). Developing the child's conception of learning. In *Educare in Europe: Report of the conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark, October 1992.* Paris: UNESCO.

The Before Five policies are described in:

Lange, D. (1988). *Before five: Early childhood care and education in New Zealand.* Wellington: Department of Education.

The 1988 working group on early childhood care produced the paper:

Education to be more: Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education. (1988). Wellington: Department of Education.

The early childhood services draft guidelines were:

Ministry of Education. (1993). *Te whāriki: Draft guidelines for developmentally-appropriate programmes in early childhood services.* Wellington: Ministry of Education.

The now official early childhood curriculum is:

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early childhood curriculum.* Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.

For an excellent summary of good practice see:

Ball, C. (1994.) *Start Right: The importance of early learning.* London: The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

The challenge for teachers of young children to be "demanders", is from:

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

That learning drives development rather than development drives learning is from page 6 of:

Smith, A. B. (1995). *Early childhood educare: Quality programmes which care and educate.* Keynote address to the International Study Conference on Childhood Education: International Perspectives, University of Oulu, Finland.

Pramling's quotes about education are from:

Pramling (1992), *see* above.

One resource to help facilitate children's learning and thinking is:

Meade, A. with Cubey, P. (1995). *Thinking children: Learning about schemas.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Warnings against the aim of transferring knowledge by group methods are found in:

Elkind, D. (1988). The resistance to developmentally appropriate education practice with young children: The real issue. In C. Wanger (Ed.), *Public school early childhood programs.* Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pascal, C. (1990). *Underfives in infant classrooms.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Press.

Works stimulated by Vygotskian and related theories about children thinking and learning include:

Bruner, J. (1985). Vygotsky: A historical and conceptual perspective. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *Culture, communication and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meade, A. (1990). Women and young children gain a foot in the door. *Women's Studies Journal.* 6 (1/2).

Wilde Astington, J. (1994). *The child's discovery of the mind.* London: Fontana Press.

The quote "... children must think out for themselves" and other evidence that Poland is shifting from a transfer of knowledge by group methods, is from:

Korczak, E. (1993). Poland. In M. Cochran (Ed.), *The international handbook of child day care policies and programs.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

The quote about the role of teachers operating within a Vygotskian perspective is from page 15 of:

Moyles, J. (1989). *Just playing? The role and status of play in early childhood education.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Nutbrown's explanation of the Vygotskian perspecitive is from pages 38-39 of:

Nutbrown, C. (1994). *Threads of thinking: Young children learning and the role of early education.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Vygotsky's reference in Nutbrown's quote is:

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

That teachers need to do more than arrange an environment within which the child can be active is from page 27 of:

Pramling (1992), *see* above.

The Thinking Children project is detailed in:

Meade & Cubey (1995), see above.

For related research, see the Froebel Institute project:

Athey, C. (1990). *Extending thought in young children: A parent-teacher partnership.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

The importance of changing habits based on developmental psychology is suggested on pages 85–86 of:

Mattick, I. (1981). The teacher's role in helping young children develop language competence. In Courtenay B. Cazden (Ed.), *Language in early childhood education.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Katz's indicators about quality early childhood education are outlined on page 201 of:

Katz, L. (1994). Perspectives on the quality of early childhood programs. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 76 (3), 200–205.

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TE KOHANGA REO: More than a Language Nest

Arapera Royal Tangiora • Kohanga Reo National Trust

Introduction

Kōhanga reo (literally, Maori "language nest" for preschool children) is a movement which has created an opportunity for me to be Maori—something which general education has failed to accommodate. It is a movement which embraces my very soul. This may sound rather passionate, and yes, it is. And yet I am but one of thousands of parents who have committed their lives to the well-being of Maori children. My husband and I celebrate the achievements of each child in our *kura kaupapa Māori* (total-immersion Maori-language schools for primary aged children), whether it be small or large. We acknowledge their skills and in so doing congratulate them for their contribution to *te iwi Māori* (Maori tribal groups). For they are a part of our extended family.

Once one has made a commitment to revitalise *te reo Māori* (the Maori language) within the *kaupapa* or philosophy of kohanga reo then one cannot escape that commitment—or should I say, one is reluctant to leave the movement. For the movement is about the *whānau* (the family). It embraces the rest of the Maori child's life. Maori parents have made an investment for the future of te iwi Maori, by their voluntary commitment, participation in decision making, and financial contribution in kohanga reo.

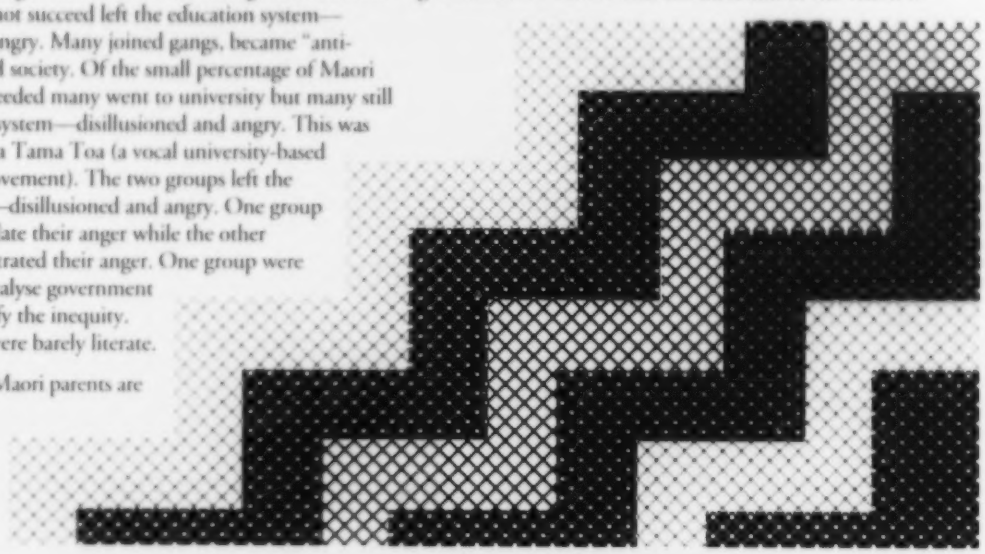
Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, the General Manager of the Kohanga Reo National Trust and one of the founders of the movement, relates a story to the people as she travels around the country. She begins by stating that the assimilation policy of the late 19th century led our people to believe that if our children learnt to speak English and stopped learning Maori they would succeed in class. However the result was that Maori people left their children at the gate of the schools at the age of five. Those children who did not succeed left the education system—disillusioned and angry. Many joined gangs, became "anti-social" and rejected society. Of the small percentage of Maori children who succeeded many went to university but many still left the education system—disillusioned and angry. This was the start of the Nga Tama Toa (a vocal university-based Maori political movement). The two groups left the education system—disillusioned and angry. One group were able to articulate their anger while the other physically demonstrated their anger. One group were able to critically analyse government policies and identify the inequity. The other group were barely literate.

To overcome this Maori parents are told that now they belong to kohanga reo they will not leave their children at the school gate but must become collectively involved in the decisions for their children's education. This means that parents will walk beside their children through kohanga reo, kura kaupapa Maori, *wharekura* (the secondary school component of kura kaupapa Maori), and *whare wānanga* (institution of higher learning). This means that parents will strengthen their own te reo Maori. This means that parents will also walk alongside other Maori parents in *kaupapa Māori* (Maori philosophy) education.

The movement has been operating since 1982 and only research will substantiate the degree to which this direction has been followed by parents. What the Kohanga Reo National Trust does know is that some of the kohanga reo children of 1982–1983 are now in their final year at secondary school, some are also studying te reo Maori at Massey University and at their secondary school. Some of the kohanga reo graduates have begun families and are parents in kohanga, and so the first generation of parents will soon actively return as grandparents.

The movement is about to undergo a change influenced by those kohanga reo graduates, the future parents. It is estimated that by the year 2000 approximately 30 percent of the children in kohanga reo will be second generation kohanga children with the parents' ages ranging from 18 to 23 years old.

Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board is already preparing for this change and the whanau have stated the need for the strengthening of te reo in the kohanga, a better intra-communication system within the movement, and more te reo Maori resources. Yet this pathway to the vision that the National Trust hears from the people poses some challenges for it is not always compatible with the policies of government. I believe that the direction of the vision to



empower te iwi Maori is now unstoppable and if necessary the kaupapa Maori education movement will operate outside legislation to retain their sovereignty.

What are the implications for government when a people are dictating what it is they want for their children's future? Who will hold the power? Why hold the power?

Kaupapa of kohanga reo

According to *Peka Matua*, an internal document of Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board, the purpose of the movement was to revitalise te reo Maori within the foundation of *tikanga Māori* (Maori values) and *āhuatanga Māori* (likeness). In doing so it was also about the strengthening of the whanau through supporting them in their decision making; the management and monitoring of the operation; and the kaupapa and quality of their kohanga reo. The children and parents were the focal point of the movement. The purpose of the policies and practices within the movement was to strengthen the whanau in their learning and development which complemented the kaupapa of kohanga reo—te reo, tikanga, and ahuatanga Maori (see figure 1).

The kaupapa of kohanga reo was set by the *kāumatua* (respected tribal elders) in those months before the launching of the first kohanga reo, Pukeatua, in Wellington. This kaupapa focused on the renaissance of Maori. It was developed, implemented, managed, controlled, and therefore owned, by Maori. It was the Maori view of the world and validated Maori knowledge, Maori methods of teaching and learning, Maori forms of assessment and evaluation, Maori methods of interacting and socialising. Te reo Maori was the vehicle to transmit this knowledge. Therefore by applying the principle of *ako* (learner/teacher), Maori methods of teaching and learning were encompassed within the lores of *whanaungatanga* (familiness).

Kohanga reo is one of the most exciting Maori initiatives undertaken by Maori people. I have been privileged to belong to this movement since 1982 and have been caught up in all the excitement, criticism, questioning, and development of the movement.

Kohanga reo is based on whanaungatanga, the support, love, and acceptance of everyone involved in the kohanga. It is a place of security. The key personnel in the whanau are the *kaumātua*, the elders, who are "the mentors, the soothsayers, the peacemakers, the wise ones based on years of experience". They are concerned with reaching amicable solutions. The parents are the workers, the protectors, the providers, the procreators of each generation. "They are vital to the existence of the whanau." The children are the future, the investment for the continuation of the whanau. They are there to be loved, nurtured, protected, and strengthened.

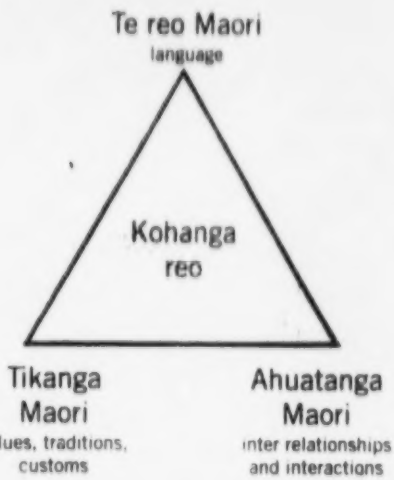
To be a true whanau whether we are referring to blood ties or to common interest groups there must be the collective responsibility and accountability of the members of that whanau to support one another, to listen, to work for the common good of the whanau to empower one another and to learn together with humility and a lot of *aroha* (love).

Pere (1994) sees this as being vital to the survival of a whanau group as a whole entity:

> Loyalty, obligation, commitment, an in-built support system made the whanau a strong unit within the *hapu* [subtribe], and consequently the tribe. (p. 26)

Kohanga reo is a movement which embraces the whanau, extended whanau, hapu, and te iwi Maori. It is on this foundation that the kaupapa of kohanga reo was built. Recent research has demonstrated that kohanga reo *are* implementing Maori methods of teaching and learning, Maori methods of interaction based on whanaungatanga, and a Maori view of the world.

FIGURE 1



History of kohanga reo

Kohanga reo was conceived in 1980 the Wananga Whakatauira, a forum organised by the Department of Maori Affairs, when elders felt that it was time for Maoridom "to take control of the future destiny of the language and to plan for its survival". This measure was adopted because of the

serious demise of te reo Maori, a result of over one hundred years of assimilation.

The first kohanga reo, Pukeatua, was opened at Wainuiomata on 13 April, 1982. Five pilot kohanga were planned for that year. But Maoridom had decided that five were not enough and within a year 107 kohanga were established. These extra kohanga operated on a $5000 establishment grant, voluntary assistance, and contributions from the whanau and Maori community. The rapid establishment of these kohanga reo caused a major concern for the Department of Social Welfare as many were refusing to licence in accordance with the Social Welfare Act. Maori people were choosing to close the doors on government departments and in so doing were establishing themselves outside legislation. Those kohanga reo who chose to licence did so because they would then have access to the childcare subsidy. They also knew that they would be required to meet health and safety requirements. The Child Care Centre Regulations (1985) had no consideration for cultural differences.

In 1982, excited by the news broadcast on television and inspired by the delivery from the community officers of the then Department of Maori Affairs, I became a whanau member of a steering committee to establish a kohanga reo in Mangere. We had no money, no building, no property, no *kaiako* (teacher) but a lot of enthusiasm. Within six months we opened our kohanga reo for 15 children, assisted by the Department of Maori Affairs grant of $5000 and the Mataatua Marae Committee who provided the land. We had five kaiako who were fluent in te reo Maori, we were licensed with the Department of Social Welfare under the childcare regulations, and we were receiving a capitation subsidy for each child to attend as they met the low income based criteria.

The survival of the language and culture

At that time I was working for an early childhood organisation and although I saw some similarities between the childcare centre I worked for and the kohanga reo that I was a voluntary member of, my perception of kohanga reo was a holistic approach to address the survival of our language and the social, economic, and educational problems experienced by Maori people.

To me kohanga reo was more than a language nest. It was more than a childcare centre. Today it has become a social, economic, health, educational, spiritual, political, and cultural renaissance for Maori. It was appropriate that kohanga reo be under the guidance of the Department of Maori Affairs when it began. I do not think the movement would have survived if it had not been so.

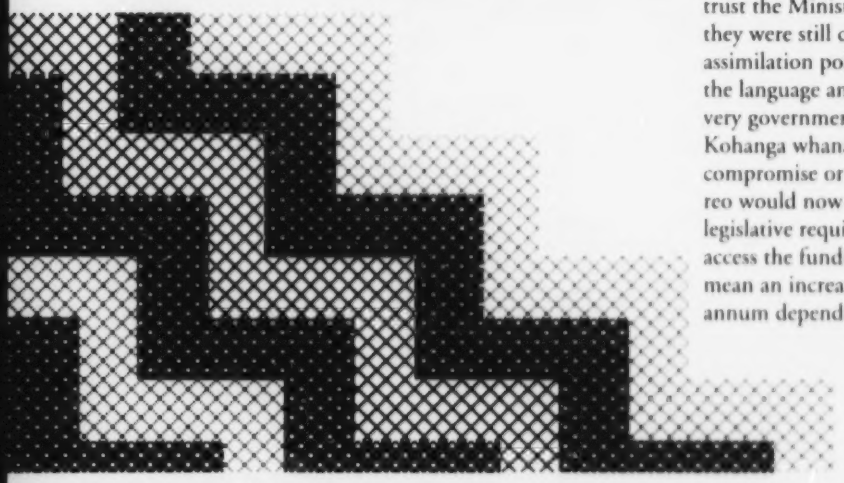
The whanau were encouraged to establish a kohanga reo where they could as long as the children were totally immersed in te reo Maori. Kohanga reo sprung up in local *marae* (the traditional meeting place), family homes, garages, community halls, church halls, and spare school classrooms. Maori people knew that to save the language from extinction as many children as possible needed to be exposed to and immersed in te reo Maori.

By 1988, when the first major government review was carried out on kohanga reo, there were 521 kohanga in operation throughout the country. Just over 8000 children were involved and 45 percent of the kohanga reo were based on marae. Government grants went from $45,000 to over $11 million in the 1987–1988 financial year. The Government review of kohanga reo in 1988 recommended "increased funding, greater training support for kaiako, and training for teacher trainees and public servants to develop cultural sensitivity". The report also recommended that "Te Kohanga Reo National Trust assume responsibility for licensing kohanga reo, and that the present accountability and administrative structures continue."

The devolution of the Department of Maori Affairs in 1989 lead to the decision by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Maori Affairs that the newly formed Ministry of Education would be the most appropriate government department to oversee kohanga reo. The reasoning was that kohanga reo, like the early childhood sector, would be eligible for funding through the Ministry of Education.

Devestating compromise

The result of this decision was seen as devastating by kohanga reo whanau. The people were angry and blamed this decision on the Kohanga Reo National Trust. Kohanga reo no longer had the mantle of Maori Affairs to shelter it. Maori people felt that the kaupapa would be owned and controlled by a ministry which would have difficulty accommodating the desires of Maori people let alone understanding the Maori viewpoint. Maori people did not trust the Ministry of Education and why should they when they were still coming to terms with the results of a harsh assimilation policy. Kohanga reo was about the survival of the language and now the movement had been given to the very government sector that was responsible for its demise. Kohanga whanau questioned whether they would have to compromise or "sell" the kaupapa for the money. Kohanga reo would now be required to fit into many policies, legislative requirements, and procedures if they wished to access the funding (which for many kohanga reo could mean an increase from $18,000 to a possible $90,000 per annum depending on the number of children attending).



In order to access to the new early childhood funding kohanga reo had to meet the new Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (1990). Many kohanga reo buildings came under scrutiny

and were required to have renovations done. During this transition the Kohanga Reo National Trust played an important negotiation role in ensuring that the policies generated from the Ministry of Education would not compromise the original kaupapa of the movement as stated by kaumatua in 1982.

Tornado through the movement

Kohanga reo continuously faces challenges with government policies, more recently the higher rate of funding for early childhood services based on quality, the discretionary grant for total immersion te reo Maori which focuses on te reo Maori immersion in the first two years and then on Maori early childhood participation during the next two years, and finally funding for training.

The last six years can be likened to a tornado whirling through the movement. The focus for the kohanga whanau has had to be on compliance. The whanau have been expected to operate and manage large amounts of funding; comply with building, safety, and health standards; develop learning programmes; assess and evaluate children's progress; enrol in training programmes to strengthen their te reo, tikanga, and ahuatanga Maori; and work as a whanau in the decision making, operation, and management of the kohanga.

One might say that this is no different from other early childhood services except that kohanga reo began in 1982 and has only been with the Ministry of Education since 1990. However, there are a number of distinct differences which have acted as temporary barriers during the establishment of individual kohanga reo:

- A lack of te reo Maori resources and people fluent in the language.
- A lack of an appropriate training programme for kaiako.
- A lack of information on policies and their implications for kohanga reo.
- Inability to access kohanga reo for their children.
- A high number of whanau in the lower socioeconomic bracket.
- Health, unemployment, and low education achievement.

The Kohanga Reo National Trust has been instrumental in overcoming each of these challenges to ensure that the primary focus is achieved, which is that children and whanau in kohanga reo learn and strengthen their reo, tikanga, and ahuatanga Maori.

A critical analysis

The preceding outline of the historical development of the kohanga reo movement is the background for the following critical analysis.

Kohanga reo is a movement which can and has moved government into a legitimation crisis. It is a movement of Maori people who believe in the rightness of the culture, the language, traditions, and values. Kohanga reo has moved Maori people to critically analyse policies, structures, and practices and Maori people have moved kohanga reo outside of those policies, structures, and practices which are culturally inappropriate.

> With the decision made by the Minister of Maori Affairs in 1989 to place Kohanga Reo under the Ministry of Education Te Kohanga Reo was on the road to legitimation. (Habermas, 1979)

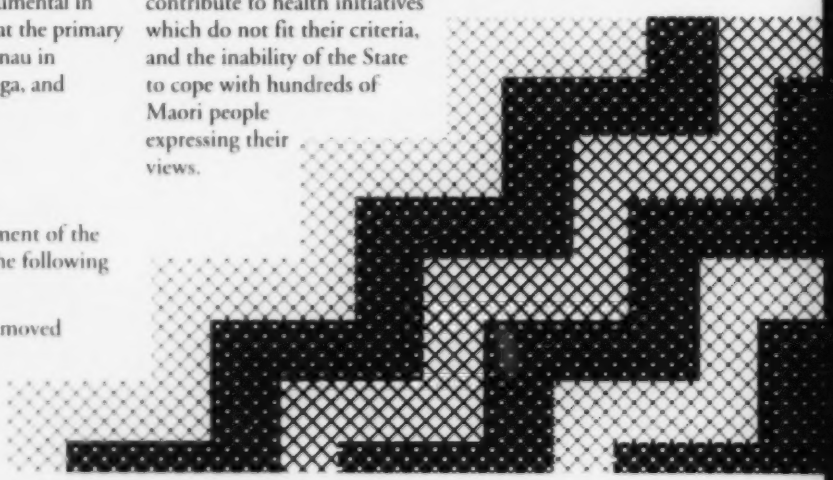
The Ministry of Education and indeed New Zealand society now defined kohanga reo as an early childhood service. This meant a phenomenal change for the kohanga whanau and meant that they were required to provide extra voluntary resources, to understand government regulations, policies, quality assurance, and the corporate system required by a New Right direction. All this for more funding.

It can be argued that the development of the kohanga reo movement created tensions within existing state education policies. These tensions can be analysed using a framework based on Habermas' legitimation theory, Bourdieu's cultural capital, Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and Freire's banking concept and pedagogy of oppression.

Tangaere (1996) argues that these frameworks demonstrate why the kohanga reo movement resisted certain policies which compromised Maori knowledge and Maori pedagogy, and why the government placed covert pressure on legitimating the movement.

The establishment of kaupapa Maori education through kohanga reo has lead to what Habermas (1979) has termed a "legitimation crisis" for the State. Habermas argued that the State has to govern according to some idea of the "common good" or within the "social norms". Therefore this created a situation where the State saw itself as the legitimate authority with its citizens abiding by the law as set for the "common good". The State began losing its power when the people became aware of the State's intentions. In fact in relation to education, health, employment, and welfare of Maori people the State had failed to provide for Maori "common good". What had arisen was a legitimation crisis where kohanga reo initiatives did not sit well within the mainstream education system.

Examples of these points of tension are the interpretation of what quality is for kohanga reo, the different delivery styles of training courses, the refusal to implement policies which compromise the kaupapa, the inability of the State to contribute to health initiatives which do not fit their criteria, and the inability of the State to cope with hundreds of Maori people expressing their views.



Similarly, Bourdieu (1973) outlined how the State establishes its curriculum according to the culture of the dominant group. This cultural capital model is based therefore on the culture that is in the decision-making arena. Tangaere (1996) stated that the assimilation policy promoted the ideology of being "one people, one country" an egalitarian state which promoted betterment for the "common good". This policy was implemented through the state education system and justified the actions taken by schools, teachers, inspectors, and the Department of Education (now the Ministry of Education) in undermining the Maori knowledge base, Maori pedagogy, and in particular the Maori language. It took until 1982, the beginning of the kohanga reo movement, whereby Maori people decided that the effects of that policy were too destructive and established a Maori cultural capital base which was acceptable to Maori.

Maori legitimation for kohanga reo is about te reo Maori, tikanga Maori, and ahuatanga Maori, as mentioned previously. To reach each apex of the triangle one must apply the concept held within the *poutama*, a lattice design which symbolises layers of stairways. For whanau this is Maori pedagogy and the climbing of the stairways internalising knowledge, values, traditions, and language will enable one to achieve. In climbing the stairways the whanau ensured that guided support was provided for each learning level. The learner was never left to travel this journey alone. There are parallels to these concepts in models and theories proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983). Royal Tangaere (1996) has explored these parallels further.

This kaupapa had been endorsed and actively promoted by Maori elders who travelled throughout the country talking with the people at the very beginning of the movement. At that time, there were no restrictions on how kohanga reo could operate, only guidelines, which became the guiding principles of the movement. As stated by the Kohanga Reo Trust, these were:

- It is the right of the Maori child to enjoy learning the Maori language within the bosom of the whanau.
- It is the right of the whanau to nurture and care for the *mokopuna* (grandchildren).
- It is the obligation of the hapu to ensure that the whanau is strengthened to carry out its responsibilities.
- It is the obligation of the iwi to advocate, negotiate, and resource the hapu and whanau.
- It is the obligation of the New Zealand government under *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (The Treaty of Waitangi) to fulfill the aspirations of the Maori people for future generations.

These guidelines and special goals were the foundation for future kohanga reo and were compiled in the *Peka Matua* (known as "The Red Book"). This was the equivalent of the Ministry of Education's charter document, *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices*.

The kohanga whanau committed themselves to the revitalisation of this kaupapa and knew that the key to this was the use of te reo. The commitment was such that government policies were scrutinised to ensure Maori legitimation. Tangaere (1996) stated that often when the kohanga reo movement had been a part of the consultation and negotiation then the policy was compatible for both kohanga reo and the government. He felt that this situation then gave rise to legitimation compatibility.

For Maori the outcome from the analysis of policies is to ensure that they adhere to and strengthen the kaupapa of kohanga reo, and develop the whanau, hapu, and iwi. Policies, procedures, and structures are measured against tikanga Maori and Maori methods of interacting. It is a filter system of all policies and the Kohanga Reo National Trust is the buffer between the government agencies, organisations, and corporate entities, and the whanau, hapu, and iwi of the kohanga reo. It requires negotiation and sharing of information with government, agencies, organisations, and most importantly the kohanga whanau. It entails identifying the intent of those policies. It is a critical analysis and clarifies the implications of these policies in relation to the kaupapa of kohanga reo.

An example of this is the development of the early childhood curriculum. During the consultation phase the Kohanga Reo National Trust was asked to write a curriculum appropriate for kohanga reo. The outcome was *Te Whāriki* (the Maori version of the early childhood curriculum) which became the framework for kohanga reo and for mainstream early childhood centres. The early childhood curriculum was developed from two consultation strands—mainstream carried out by Carr and May of the School of Education at the University of Waikato and kohanga reo whanau conducted by Tilly and Tamati Reedy for kohanga reo. The two perspectives were merged without compromising either world view. The strands and goals of *Te Whāriki* are based on:

- *mana atua*—well-being,
- *mana whenua*—belonging,
- *mana tangata*—contribution,
- *mana reo*—communication, and
- *mana aotūroa*—exploration.

Te whāriki is not new to te iwi Maori. It has been present in kohanga reo since its beginning and has been transmitted orally from kaumatua and kaiako to parents and children. Now for the Ministry of Education it is legitimated as it is in a written form.

Legitimation crisis

When a situation or policy arises which causes cultural conflict for the kaupapa of kohanga reo then the National Trust

refuses to be a part of that government policy, chooses to stand outside it, or refuses to implement it even at the possibility of losing access to funding.

According to Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, the General Manager of the Kohanga Reo National Trust, kohanga reo caused a major concern for government as these kohanga were considered illegal. A legitimation crisis had occurred. According to the State, Maori people were openly breaking the law and the government was powerless to stop it.

The Social Welfare Act 1960 stated that where more than three children from different families were being cared for away from their parents or guardians then the group must be licensed according to the childcare regulations. This law was counteracted with the Department of Maori Affairs encouraging the parents to stay with their children in the kohanga so that they may assist with the daily operations and management and more importantly so that they too may learn te reo Maori. The whanau were also given the responsibility to manage the budget, make all decisions for their children, and maintain the scarce language resources.

With the transition to the Ministry of Education new laws and regulations governed the whanau if they wished to access the bulk funding—and what a large, tempting carrot that was! Over time as the movement began accepting more funding from the State it enabled the State to have more say in determining structures. The State was able to wield more control. Unfortunately the structures were from a *Pākehā* (New Zealander of European ancestory) cultural capital and the struggles for kohanga reo became *kaupapa moni* versus *kaupapa Māori*—economy versus culture. Statutory regulations and charters are the State's method of asserting control over kaupapa Maori education. The reward is funding and the requirements are the responsibility of reporting on financial management, on operations or identified performance indicators, and on quality management systems.

Tangaere (1996) argued that the State only goes so far in supporting the validation of kohanga reo, and although it has policies which state the importance of ensuring the survival of te reo Maori, and policies on employment, training, and health initiatives for Maori it prefers kaupapa Maori education to fit with that of mainstream education. This is based on the ideology that one must be accountable for tax payers' money and therefore must be for the "common good". Therefore quality assurance systems must be evident. It portrays the philosophy of the New Right, which reinforces individualism and competition rather than collaborative and collective input. It tends to lean strongly away from the cultural or people perspective.

In the cultural perspective Smith (1990) stated that the people *can* make a difference. They can have some control, some influence over what happens to them, over their own lives, over their own world.

At the end of the day these are only small gains which are being made in the wider framework, because at any time the state has ultimate control by withdrawing funds from kohanga reo. The whole structure would once again depend on Maori goodwill. The idea of the State here in giving money is to again develop the dependency of communities. This is done firstly by economic dependency on the State so

GLOSSARY OF MAORI WORDS AND PHRASES

Maori words are italicised on their first use in the text and the nearest English equivalent that best captures the meaning is given in parenthesis. These words are listed below for ease of reference.

āhuatanga	literally "likeness"; in the kohanga reo context, Maori pedagogy or Maori way of doing things
ako	learn/teach
akonga	learners or students
Aotearoa	literally "long white cloud"; in common usage as the Maori name for New Zealand
aroha	love
te iwi	tribal group
hapū	subtribe, subdivision of an iwi
kaikao	teacher
kaupapa	philosophy, plan, purpose
kaumāta	respected tribal elder
kaupapa Māori	Maori culture
kaupapa moni	economy
te kōhanga reo	literally "language nest"; a preschool education centre using the Maori language and run according Maori kaupapa and tikanga
kura kaupapa Māori	total-immersion Maori-language school for primary-aged children
marae	meeting place; cultural centre of local Maori community
mokopuna	grandchild(ren)
Pākehā	New Zealander of European ancestory
poutama	stairway to knowledge, stepped pattern of weaving
tikanga	customs, protocol
tikanga Māori	Maori values
te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi, the constitutional agreement between the Crown and the indigenous Maori people
reo	language
te reo Māori	Maori language
wananga	forum or meeting
whānau	family
whanaungatanga	support and love, familiness, living as part of an extended family
wharekura	term used to describe the secondary school component of kura kaupapa Maori
whare wānanga	institution or course of higher learning
te whāriki	the early childhood curriculum

that the State manipulates what happens, upping or downing the monetary input or monetary support.

Future directions for kohanga reo

The pathway for kohanga reo is about whanau development. It is not just about the revival of the Maori language any more. The whanau have insisted on broadening this vision. Since 1982 the movement under the guidance of the trustees have developed many new initiatives. These are:

- An insurance policy which ensures adequate coverage of all assets for future generations of kohanga children.
- A health fund to address the urgent health needs of the kohanga children.
- Three training programmes:
  - Te Tino Rangatiratanga Whakapakari course for kaiako in kohanga reo is a three-year training programme launched in 1992 as a pilot.
  - Te Ara Tuatahi mo te Reo Maori is a one-year course for people with very little competency in te reo Maori and encompasses mokopuna development and administration of a kohanga.
  - Te Ara Tuarua is a one-year te reo Maori programme which endeavours to strengthen the literacy of those who are semi fluent and prepare them for the three-year training course.

All three courses are learnt in the kohanga reo within the whanau, hapu, iwi structure of the kohanga. There are 550 *akonga* (students) enrolled in the three-year course, just over 200 enrolled in the course for semi-fluent speakers and 1200 enrolled in the beginners te reo Maori course. All akonga are active members of the kohanga reo movement.

- Pilot project on mokopuna assessment alongside *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum.
- Development of improved communication systems.

Each of these initiatives are carried out for the children of kohanga reo. The assets, the kaupapa, the language, the tikanga are under the guardianship of the trustees for future generations.

NOTES

ARAPERA ROYAL TANGAERE, of Te Arawa, Ngati Ruakawa, and Kaitahu descent, is currently working with the Kohanga Reo National Trust. Formerly she was the Director of the School of Early Childhood Education at Auckland College of Education.

Edited with the author's approval, this first appeared as:

Royal Tangaere, A. (1996). Te kohanga reo: More than a language nest. The future of te reo Maori, te iwi Maori and a people's soul. The Dame Jean Herbison Lecture. In *Keynotes: 18th annual conference, 5–8 December 1996, Nelson* (pp. 39–48). New Zealand Association of Research in Education.

The ideas expressed here are further explored in:

Royal Tangaere, A. (1996). *Te puawaitanga o te reo Maori.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Royal Tangaere, A. (1992). *Te Puāwaitanga o te reo. Ka hua te hā o te pōtiki i roto i te whānua ko tēnei te tāhuhu o te kohanga reo—language transference from te kohanga reo to home: The roles of the child and the family.* Unpublished master's thesis, Auckland University.

Statements about the purpose of the kohanga reo movement were from:

Government Review Team. (1988). *Government review of te kohanga reo: Language is the life force of the people./Te whakamatau a te kanawa: Te kohanga reo.* Wellington: Author.

Hohepa, M. K. (1990). *Te kohanga reo. Hei tikanga ako i te reo Maori; Te kohanga reo as a context for language learning.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland.

Ka'ai, T. (1990). *Te hiringa taketake: Mai i te kohanga reo i te kura; Maori pedagogy: Te kohanga reo and the transition to school.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland.

Royal Tangaere, A. (1996). *A framework for developing quality in Aotearoa: A kohanga reo perspective.* Keynote address, at the Children's Issues Centre (of Dunedin) National Seminar, Wellington.

The Kohanga Reo National Trust. (1983). *Peka matua, or The red book,* (an internal document to assist whanau development, the equivalent of the Ministry of Education's 1990 charter document, Statement of desirable objectives and practices, available from Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board, Wellington).

The principle of "ako" is referenced to:

Pere, R. R. (1994). *Ako.* (Rev. ed.). Wellington: Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Board.

The respective roles in kohanga reo of kaumatua, parents, and children are noted by:

Nepe, T. (1991). *Te toi huarewa ti puna: Kaupapa Maori: An educational intervention system.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland.

The importance of collective responsibility and accountability of members of a whanau to support one another is noted by:

Nepe (1991), *see* above.

Pere (1994), *see* above.

The foundations on which kohanga reo were built were acknowledged in:

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whariki matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum.* Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.

Recent research showing that kohanga reo are implementing Maori methods includes:

Hohepa (1990), *see* above.

Ka'ai (1990), *see* above.

Royal Tangaere (1992), *see* above.

White, M. (1995). *Te wero-te uru whakatupu ake te uru o matawhaura; Language scaffolding in a kohanga reo.* Unpublished master's thesis, Auckland University.

That it was time for Maoridom to take control of the future destiny of the language was acknowledged on page 18 of:

Government Review Team (1988), *see* above.

That the development of the kohanga reo movement created tensions within state education policies is noted in:

Tangaere, R. B. (1996). *Kaupapa Maori education.* Assignments for master's thesis.

The frameworks for Tangaere's analysis include:

Bourdieu, P. (1973). Three forms of theoretical knowledge. *Social Science Information, 12*(1), 53–80.

Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from prison notebooks* (Hoare & Smith, Trans. & Eds.). New York: International Publishers.

Habermas, J. 1971. *Knowledge and human interests.* Boston, MA: Beacon.

Theories which explore ideas similar to those expressed in Maori pedagogy include:

Bruner, J. S. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language.* New York: Norton.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

That people can make a difference is stated by:

Smith, L. (1990). Maori education—a reassertion. In *Puna Wairere, essays by Maori.* Wellington: New Zealand Planning Council.

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ETHICAL QUANDARIES
FOR NEOPHYTE EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS

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INTRODUCTION

Neophyte practitioners or "trainee teachers" in early childhood education are faced with a myriad of concerns and issues in relation to the practice of the profession when they attend practicum placements or sections. This paper considers the role of professional ethics and ethical standards in the conduct of professions and reports on a survey of students which examines student experiences and perceptions of ethical dilemmas in the practicum. Some examples of the students' perceptions of ethical dilemmas they encountered in the practicum and their ability to respond are presented. The paper also suggests actions that may be taken within teacher preparation courses for the development of strategies to assist neophytes to resolve the quandaries they face.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The authors have pointed out elsewhere that the constitution of ethical conduct is a construction of morality based on the cultural and professional biases of those in positions of power. Such biases are then taken to be the accepted norms of behaviour, the ethical standards. The notion of ethics is never unproblematic. Because what constitutes ethical behaviour is context-specific, it is difficult to define. Thus when authors such as Annis (1989) attempt to define ethics, there remains the need to contextualise the definition in terms of who decides what is "good" or "bad" and by whose values and criteria. Annis suggests that:

> Ethics deals with what acts are morally right or wrong, what our moral obligations are, what the conditions are under which we are morally responsible for our acts, what moral rules or principles are justified, what traits or dispositions are morally good or bad, that is, virtues or vices, what things are desirable from a moral point of view, and related issues. Professional ethics deals with the same issues only it examines them in terms of one's professional role or the role of a profession in society, for example, what acts are right or wrong given one's professional role, what are one's professional obligations etc.

Liang, Schuen and Neher (1996) point out that the concept of professional ethics:

> ... represents the impact of spiritual power such as values, mindset and morals on the practitioner's operations. It is the criteria [sic] to which the practitioners refer when they wish to justify a decision. Professional ethics are objectively regulated by system rules such as laws, formal guidelines and societal norms, and are subjectively bounded by personal values.

The notion of professional ethics being "objectively regulated" is itself debatable. Instead the interpretation of what is considered to be ethical conduct needs to be contextualised to a specific group or even a specific situation at a particular point in time. It is expressly the inability of ethics to be objectively regulated which gives rise to "ethical dilemmas".

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Katz (1992) defines the dilemma as a predicament wherein there is a choice between alternative courses of action and the selection of one of the alternatives sacrifices the advantages that offered by a different selection. She continues:

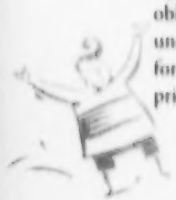
> It is assumed further, that each of the two "horns" of the dilemma, A and B, carry with them their own errors; alternative A involves certain errors as does alternative B; error-free alternatives are not really available. In principle, each of the available alternatives involves "a choice of error"'. Thus part of our task is to determine which error is preferred in each predicament.

Such dilemmas arise frequently for those who are drawn into teaching although Sottile (1994) points out that teachers generally have little preparation for dealing with these issues. For students who do not have the benefit of several years of teaching experience the choices may appear more like traps for the unwary. The survey reported here sought information about early childhood education students' experiences of decision making in situations of dilemma while they were on practicum placements. The purpose of the survey at this time was as a "pilot" to provide some foundation data from which a determination could be made to proceed with a more extensive piece of research.

THE SURVEY

In July and August 1995, 179 students enrolled in early childhood teacher education programs through Charles Sturt University (CSU), at Wagga Wagga in New South Wales and the University of Western Sydney, Nepean (UWS) were surveyed by means of a written questionnaire. Fifty-four of the respondents were first-year students, 50 were in their second year, and 75 were third-year-students, 18 of whom were studying at CSU. The survey instrument comprised 12 questions intended to elicit information in relation to the students' knowledge about the existence of codes of ethics, their understandings about such codes, and their experiences with ethical dilemmas during their practicum sessions.

Student responses revealed that the understandings students had of what



constituted a code of ethics could be categorised into four areas: professionalism; guidelines, standards, and structures; beliefs, values, and attitudes; and behaviours and practices.

These categorisations arose from the data and were not predetermined.

Examples of the responses from the students which were included in each of the categorisations were:

PROFESSIONALISM

Our professional responsibility towards the children, parents, colleagues, and the community.

A list of the expectations of a professional in their field. Thus, what is expected of them, the roles they have, and their responsibilities.

Statements which bind a profession together. Ethics are sort of a law by which you should abide, believe, and understand.

A summary of information relevant to a particular profession that outlines suitable or acceptable practice while working within that profession on a daily basis, based on professional community beliefs.

GUIDELINES, STANDARDS, AND STRUCTURES

Guidelines for suitable and desirable conduct.

A code of ethics is a "code" which we follow. It provides a standard or guideline—may or may not be signed.

A set of statements of "advice" that a certain profession may use as a guideline to issues relating to work.

A set of guidelines owned and designed by professionals to ensure continuity and quality in all areas of their work.

Guidelines which should be followed in relation to children, families, the community, staff, and towards ourselves.

A set of rules to protect the rights of others.

BELIEFS, VALUES, AND ATTITUDES

Beliefs and moral compromises.

A set of common beliefs, attitudes, and values amongst a profession.

Thoughts and beliefs, theories about what is the correct and best way to do your job.

A code of ethics is not really a philosophy but a set of beliefs shared by a group.

Personal beliefs and values that influence your behaviour in daily interactions.

A set of morals, beliefs, and values that people in a certain profession should adhere to.

BEHAVIOURS AND PRACTICES

A code of ethics is a set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviours of members of a professional group.

Conduct, a summary of correct things to do.

A list of ethical practices and behaviours which must be used and practised by the early childhood professional at all times.

A statement of the expected behaviours that will occur within a centre. The centre usually devises the ethics themselves.

As the responses above might indicate, the responses provided overlapped into two or more of the categorisations, so it was not possible to specify the *number* of responses exclusive to each category nor even those that might be generally included in the category.

It was noted however that a majority of responses alluded to the notion of "Guidelines, standards, and structures". There was only the occasional reference to issues of moral conduct though this concept might well have been an implicit understanding within the students' conceptions about beliefs and values or behaviours and practices.

As the authors have noted elsewhere there seemed to be the general expectation that codes of ethics were imposed from beyond the day-to-day lives of the practitioners and that there was little sense of ownership of what was contained within such codes and limited consideration of the students' own moral and ethical stance. Similarly, there appeared to be scant understanding that codes might allow for autonomous action and critically reflective practice.

More than two-thirds of the students reported that they had witnessed three or more situations of ethical dilemma while on practicum placements with the largest group, 25 percent, reporting that they had observed six ethical dilemmas since they had begun their course of study at their tertiary institution. The dilemmas that were described, however, indicated some confusion in understanding the difference between ethical dilemmas and the observation of poor practice though some did suggest that the choices that confronted them when being drawn into, or observing, poor practice was the source of the dilemma.

Examples of observations of poor practice rather than ethical dilemmas *per se* included:

On prac I was asked to change a baby without wearing gloves.

Staff not keeping developmental records.

An example of a comment which "created" a dilemma from observations of such practice was reported thus:

When I was an assistant in a 0-3s room and the materials given to the babies were developmentally inappropriate. My dilemma was, should I mention this to the teacher or not?

Several of the stories provided by the students seemed to include an implicit, if unarticulated, query of "Should I mention it?"; "Should I intervene?"; "Should I report it to someone else?"

The short descriptions of the professional ethical dilemmas the students had faced were loosely coded into three categories of indicators: interactions and practices, abuse, and supervision of students.

Again, it was difficult to code responses into discrete categories. It is arguable that those descriptions relating to abuse could similarly have been coded for interactions and practices and so on. Examples of the coded data for each of the categories included:

INTERACTIONS AND PRACTICES

This category of data included those issues relating to confidentiality, staff interactions, and staff relationships with parents.

A parent told me to hit his children when they are misbehaving and since I wouldn't, he questioned what kind of caregiver I was for not hitting the children to make them do the right thing.

At my prac-school, I had first class (six-year-olds) and I was teaching and a girl

had written something in her book (I think we were doing story-writing) and she showed the teacher. The teacher said her writing was terrible, ripped the page out of the book and told her to write it again. I did not agree with what was done.

An assistant roughly manhandled [sic] a child who was suffering from separation anxiety. The assistant was abusive both physically and verbally. The mother of the child happened to have observed the incident and withdrew her child from care. The assistant declared she had done nothing wrong and had the support of the rest of the staff. But I was in a situation of being the middle man. I saw what the mother saw, but was expected to take the defence of the assistant.

It is clear that students are exposed to a range of situations which cause them to be concerned while they are undertaking professional experience in schools and centres.

The director of a centre told a boy that the home corner was only for girls and that he should do something else.

A parent wanted to know about another child's progress and as a student, also as a professional, it was not my position to reveal any confidential information.

Staff bitching about other staff in front of me and asking my opinion about them.

ABUSE

The category of "abuse" included those incidents which related to the perceived physical or emotional abuse of children.

In a small group situation, a child was singled out, pulled up by his arm and made to stand in the corner while the teacher yelled at him in front of the other children.

During rest time, one of the relief staff held a child upside down by his legs until he said he would sleep.

I did not believe in the way the children were criticised or put down by the teachers. Those children who were from different cultures or backgrounds were particular targets. The teachers continued the judgments, jokes, and their comments to me and expected me to feel the same and to treat the children in the same way.

At a daycare centre one staff member told off a child in a way that was quite unpleasant in front of other staff members and all other children and then locked him in a baby chair. But the child wasn't a baby, he was nearly three. Everyone there was told not to communicate with him.

Insisting that a distressed child (under two years of age) wait 40 minutes for her bottle. She was constantly crying and asking for it, but had to wait for morning tea.

SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS

In terms of the supervision of students, there were examples reported where the students felt that they were put in an invidious position because they were left to cope on their own.

Being left alone by teachers in the nappy room with two babies on first year prac. I did not feel happy about this or trained enough to handle this situation.

Being left alone in the classroom with children.

I was asked to sit with a group of children during morning tea. This was my first visit and I was not sure of what they expected of me. I asked the children to sit down and one child wasn't doing what I said. I asked nicely and then told him. He had a piece of fruit in his mouth and spat it at me. Another teacher came over and took him away.

A group of three- and four-year-old boys kept on swearing at me and other children. At first I was shocked as I didn't know how to deal with it. I felt all I could say was that "that sort of language isn't used here at daycare". However, they kept on saying, "You stupid, fucking slut!"

It is clear that students are exposed to a range of situations which cause them to be concerned while they are undertaking professional experience in schools and centres. The final questions on the survey were used to garner some information about the students' self-rankings of how confident they felt about knowing what to do in the situations they described, how confident they would now feel about handling the situation, and finally how well-prepared they feel to deal with such ethical dilemmas in the work situation when they are teachers.

When asked how confident they felt about knowing what to do when they were faced with a quandary, or practical dilemma, the largest group of respondents (35.4 percent) indicated that their confidence was limited. When these students were combined with those who felt no confidence at all in dealing with the situations, the size of the "lacking in confidence group" grew to 47 percent. The remainder of the responses to this question were spread across those who felt their confidence was developing (34 percent) and those who felt quite confident or very confident (19 percent).

The perceptions of confidence grew over the two subsequent questions. The first of these sought to discover how confident the students felt "now" about how to deal with ethical situations during field experiences. Here, 27 percent responded that they were quite confident or very confident and 45 percent felt that their confidence was continuing to develop.

Finally, there seemed to be much more confidence across the group in response to the question, "How prepared do you feel about your ability to handle difficult ethical situations when you commence work?" Only 16 percent of students still felt that their confidence level was limited or below, while 47 percent reported that their confidence was developing and 36 percent believed that they would be quite or very confident in their ability to handle the situation.

The raw appearance of this data indicates a firm ambivalence on the part of the students regarding their confidence in relation to situations involving dilemmas. However a preliminary statistical analysis revealed that the level of confidence amongst the students increased according to their succeeding years of study and their exposure to what was regarded as acceptable forms of professional practice.

STRATEGIES

Codes of ethics or codes of practice are often perceived as valuable attributes of professions or trades groups whether because they encourage positive public perceptions or because they mandate conformity to one form of behaviour. Similarly the concern remains that such codes may be ideologically driven and effectively undermine the rights and responsibilities of professional practitioners to act autonomously in response to a particular situational context.

Unlike some other professional groups like medicos and architects, for instance, the right to practise as a professional in early childhood education is dictated by levels of formal qualifications held rather than by sworn adherence to a code of ethics. This situation seems to hold little disadvantage when Coady's rejoinder is considered. Coady (1994) points out that:

> The past record of many professions in enforcing their codes of ethics is not reassuring, leading many to believe that such codes provide a veneer of professional commitment to hide incompetence and malpractice behind a collective wall of secrecy justified by the principle of confidentiality.

It is thus incumbent upon the institutions preparing practitioners for the early childhood sector to ensure that their graduates have a clear understanding of ethical practices rather than shifting responsibility to the application of such codes.

There needs to be some differentiation between those guidelines which relate to general codes of practice in early childhood settings (such as the Australian Early Childhood Association's (AECA) *Code of Ethics* and the *Code of Ethical Conduct* of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)) and those which relate specifically to ethics in the practicum, *Guidelines for Ethical Practice in the Practicum* developed by the Early Childhood Practicum Council of New South Wales.

The *Guidelines* were developed by the Practicum Council with a specific focus on the particular responsibilities and situations which present themselves in the practicum and evolved as an adjunct to the AECA Code of Ethics. As with the AECA Code, the *Guidelines* are not enforceable through sanctions, however, they clearly address those responsibilities for ethical practice that are applicable to the tertiary institution, the student, the professional colleague, and the centre or school and inform each about the expectations held for them and what they might expect of other stakeholders.

Nichols and Owens (1995) are mindful of three basic motivations which draw people into teaching. They summarise these underlying orientations as: "a sense of calling, a service ethic, and a perceived legitimacy of teaching responsibilities". In the practicum, then, the centrality of the safety and well-being of the child in the setting remains uncontested, but the vulnerable figure of the neophyte practitioner is added. The sense of calling, integrity, and developing skills of these "trainees" also need to be nurtured and protected.

A primary concern in preparing students to meet the challenges of the practicum should be ensuring that students and co-operating staff are aware of what the profession as a whole regards as acceptable practice. This could be addressed by encouraging tertiary institutions to include the *Guidelines for Ethical Practice* within practicum handbooks to ensure dissemination to all co-operating colleagues involved in any given practicum session. This strategy would allow the *Guidelines* to be available as part of any pre-practicum conference that occurred between the student, co-operating staff, and tertiary institution liaison personnel as well as for quick reference during the practicum. It would also provide a focus for debriefing by both staff and students following the practicum session.

The *Guidelines* largely reflect what Strike (1995) refers to as the "public language ... of a morally pluralistic society". He points out that such a language would have three sublanguages which educators use to communicate in terms of public education:

- a rights language—"talk competently about due process, equal opportunity, privacy, and democracy";
- a language of caring or nurturance—because learners "have needs and projects that must be respected, [the learners] need to grow and mature"; and
- a language of integrity about subject matter—"teachers need to respect evidence and argument, they need to respect values internal to their subject matters, they need an ethic appropriate to the life of the mind and the pursuit of truth".

Strike also suggests that thinking about relating notions of ethics to learners in terms of a language "also allows us to connect instruction in ethics to important points about how people learn to see and interpret their worlds". When this is overlaid on the day-to-day work experiences of practitioners, instruction incorporating the need to consider ethical outcomes in their practice assists practitioners to be more reflective about their own needs and/or any preconceptions which they hold.

The strategies which can be employed to introduce the *Guidelines* to each of the stakeholder groups include information seminars within the tertiary setting and inservice sessions for staff either in individual settings or group inservices which include staff from a number of settings at a time. Such strategies could be supported by consideration of various resource publications which direct attention to the understanding and implementation of ethical guidelines.

A primary concern in preparing students to meet the challenges of the practicum should be ensuring that students and co-operating staff are aware of what the profession as a whole regards as acceptable practice.

In developing and implementing inservice strategies, care must be taken to avoid a wholly metropolitan model of

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information dissemination to ensure the involvement of staff and students in rural and remote locations. The production of a video-recording of examples and discussion topics will assist in overcoming a little of the tyranny of distance and will also assist as a teaching tool in the preparation of students for the practicum. Such a resource is currently in production under the auspices of grant from the Commonwealth Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development.

CONCLUSION

The social and moral contexts of teaching are never stagnant. For this reason codes of ethics and guidelines for ethical practice should remain as guidelines. Primary responsibility to prepare graduates who will practise ethically in early childhood education is firmly within the purview of tertiary institutions. The secondary responsibility for ensuring continuing ethical practice rests with the profession of early childhood educators at large.

Those who have been well-prepared in early childhood education should feel confident to make autonomous ethical decisions in response to the particular temporal and social contexts of the moment. They need to be sure in the knowledge that they are able to act in the best interests of the child or children in their care. A set of hard and fast rules cannot cover every contingency faced by the practitioner and thus is more likely to create confusion and consternation. On the other hand, a set of guidelines to ethical practice can prove to be an invaluable aid.

NOTES

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Her primary research interests are in ethics in the practicum, how children learn, and early intervention.

For more details of this study see:

Coombe, K. & Newman, L. (1996). *Ethics and the practicum: A pilot study.* A paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Early Childhood Education, Canberra.

Coombe, K. & Newman, L. (1997). Ethics in early childhood field experiences. *Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, 1*, 1–10.

The constitution of ethical conduct is discussed in:

Coombe & Newman (1997), *see* above.

The quote by Annis is from page 3 of:

Annis, D. B. (1989). *Professional ethics in education: A neglected issue.* A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

The quote by Liang et al. is from page 434 of:

Liang, C., Schuen, T., & Neher, I. (1996). The reality of corporate education. *Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Presentations.* Presented at the 18th Convention for the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Indianapolis, pp 431–436.

The quote by Katz is from page 165 of:

Katz, L. G. (1992). Dilemmas in teaching. In B. Lambert (Ed.), *Changing faces.* Canberra: Australian Early Childhood Association.

That teachers have little preparation for dealing with ethical dilemmas is from:

Sottile, J. M. (1994). *Teaching and ethics.* (ERIC Accession No. ED378174)

That there is little sense of ownership by students of codes of ethics is noted in:

Coombe & Newman (1996), *see* above.

The value to professions of codes of ethic is noted on page 28 of:

Coombe, K. (1997). Ethics and the CPE Agenda. In D. Dymock, *CPE '97: Through the looking glass.* Armidale: University of New England.

Coady's rejoinder is from page 5 of:

Coady, M. (1994.) Ethical and legal issues for early childhood practitioners. In E. J. Mellor & K. M. Coombe (Eds.), *Issues in early childhood services: Australian perspectives.* Dubuque: WCB.

For further information about the Guidelines for Ethical Practice in the Practicum contact:

The Chairperson of the Early Childhood Practicum Council of New South Wales, Ms Lois Pollnitz, Faculty of Education, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, 2308 Australia.

The three basic motivations are summarised on page 47 of:

Nichols, T. & Owens, L. A. (1995). The role of teacher education in nurturing honorable and principled teaching. *Educational Horizons, 74* (1), 43–48.

The public language referred to by Strike is from page 31 of:

Strike, K. A. (1995). Professional ethics and the education of professionals. *Educational Horizons, 74*(1), 29–36.

The need for instruction to be more reflective of the practitioners' preconceptions is from page 27 of:

Coombe (1997), *see* above.

Publications which direct attention to the implementation of ethical guidelines include:

Fasoli, L. & Woodrow, C. (1991). *Getting ethical: A resource book for workshop leaders.* Canberra: Australian Early Childhood Association.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1994). Using NAEYC's code of ethics: A tool for real life. *Young Children, 49*(6), 50–51.

Footnote for New Zealand readers:

The Early Childhood Education Code of Ethics for Aotearoa/New Zealand was launched at the Sixth Early Childhood Convention in Auckland, 1995. Various early childhood organisations have either adopted it or are considering adopting it. The code can be obtained by writing to: The Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, c/- NZEI Te Riu Roa, P O Box 466, Wellington.

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Factors impacting on children's adjustment to the first year of primary school

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"The transition to school has been perceived as one of the major challenges children have to face in their early childhood years."

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Starting school is a period of transition and adjustment for children. It is a time of having to cope with change and with the challenges, uncertainties, and tensions which accompany the transition. Children who adjust adequately to the first year of school can overcome much of the initial stress resulting from transition. They are also more likely to be successful in their future progress than children who have difficulty adjusting to the new situation; and their behaviour is less likely to show the negative effects of stressful transition.

Adjustment to the new situation is seen as a critical outcome of successful transition. Having the necessary skills to respond to the demands of the new environment and being able to work independently are two important attributes which contribute to adjustment. Children who lack, or experience difficulty with, social or cognitive skills, and who exhibit problem behaviours, are at risk of not adjusting to school.

In focusing on the transition that occurs as children move from preschool-type situations (including kindergarten, childcare, and home) to school, it has been widely acknowledged that problems can occur as a result of differences or discontinuities between the two environments. The more unfamiliar the school environment, the more difficult it is for children to adjust. When children are prepared for making the transition to school they gain self confidence and are more likely to succeed.

There is a variety of sources of discontinuity that create challenges and stresses for children commencing school. Once they are identified, it is possible to focus on developing strategies for effective transition programs which promote the smooth placement and adjustment of the child to school and bridge the gap between preschool and school experiences.

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL —THE CHALLENGES

Discontinuities which impact on children's adjustment to school include changes in the physical environment, difference in the curricula, differences in the expectations of teaching staff, changes to the role and involvement of the parents, and changes to the peer group.

PHYSICAL DISCONTINUITIES

Discontinuities between the physical environments include the condition and size of the buildings; the classroom equipment; the location of the toilets, classrooms, and play areas relative to each other; the number and ages of the children in the class; and the staff-to-child ratio.

DISCONTINUITIES IN CURRICULA

By tradition schools have a product-based cognitive learning approach with emphasis on ways children are taught to acquire knowledge and skills. In contrast, preschools are based on a developmental approach which acknowledges that learning is best when there is a focus on all aspects of a child's development, and that learning is an interactive process between children and adults involving the active exploration of the environment and concrete materials. A developmental approach acknowledges individual differences within a developmental framework. When there is a move from a developmental approach to a cognitive curricula approach children can experience difficulties, including:

- restrictions on the use of time which emphasise the work/play distinction,
- confining of gross motor activities to physical education lessons and playtime,
- less art and tactile experiences,
- less opportunity for imaginative play,
- a curriculum focus on verbal and symbolic activities,
- increases in waiting times,
- the daily schedule being more structured, and
- more formal rules and routines.

DISCONTINUITIES OF TEACHING STAFF

Discontinuities associated with the teaching staff include the number and the role of the staff. Not only can the attitudes and expectations of staff vary from preschool to school (often based on their training) but as children move to specialist classrooms they need to adjust to the different attitudes and expectations of each teacher. This necessitates children having increased independence and self-help skills and the necessary skills for obtaining the assistance of the teacher. Where there is continuity between previous and current expectations of teachers, children will have the greatest chance of success.

DISCONTINUITIES IN PEER GROUPS

Children commencing school are faced with differences between school and previous social groups and these often require the child to make new friends. This is a critical consideration. Having friends in the same class may help children adjust to these new social demands.

DISCONTINUITIES IN THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

Parents and teachers are both vitally interested in what is best for the child and yet there is often very little interchange between the two. In overcoming discontinuities between the role of the parents in preschool and school situations, parents need to be involved in the school.

EFFECTIVE TRANSITION

To minimise the differences which may occur between previous early childhood settings and school, it is important to overcome situations that may disrupt children's learning and development, and to prepare children and their parents for the new school situation. Children's adjustment to school is influenced by many factors. In order to overcome the discontinuities that have the potential to disrupt children's adjustment to school, it is imperative that effective transition programs are developed. These programs should:

- provide children with many opportunities to experience the school environment;
- give parents information about the school;

- ensure that there is collaboration and the exchange of information between home, preschool, and childcare services and schools;
- include activities prior to and during the commencement of school; and
- be responsive to local community needs.

In this way the unfamiliar will become familiar, continuity of experiences will be facilitated, the child will feel more secure in the new environment, schools will have valuable knowledge of children's prior experiences, and the speedy adjustment of children and families into the new setting will be facilitated.

ADJUSTMENT TO SCHOOL —A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Whilst there is consensus about what constitutes an effective transition program, there is only limited research data measuring the impact of transition programs on children's adjustment to school. There are very few studies of transition processes and children's adjustment to the first year of school, and this research has generally provided qualitative measures of adjustment in descriptive studies, rather than quantitative measures of adjustment to school.

Given the pervasiveness of school adjustment problems in having lasting or cumulative effects, and the potential costs to the individual and to society, there is a need to study "...early school adjustment or adaptation and to identify factors that forecast children's adjustment to the first year of school..."

To identify factors that impact on children's adjustment the first year of school, the Adjustment to School Project proposed that if transition programs are implemented to assist children's adjustment to the initial demands of commencing school, the success of these programs can be better assessed by a quantitative measure of children's adjustment to school. It was anticipated that children attending schools that conduct a high number of transition activities adjust better to school initially, than children attending schools that conduct a more limited number of transition activities.

The study involved 197 children from preparatory classes in four Melbourne government primary schools. Two of these schools conducted high numbers of transition activities and two schools conducted low numbers of transition activities. Two preparatory classes from each school were involved in the study. Schools were matched as closely as possible on the basis of preparatory class numbers, straight age preparatory class structure, female teaching staff, and estimated socioeconomic status of the majority of school families. Eight teachers participated in the study and all parents were invited to participate.

Children's adjustment to school was measured in terms of social skills, problem behaviour, and academic competence using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), by Gresham & Elliott (1987).

FACTORS IMPACTING ON ADJUSTMENT TO SCHOOL

The results of this study suggest that a number of factors impact significantly on children's adjustment to school.

NUMBERS OF TRANSITION ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY SCHOOLS

Children adjusted significantly better to school when they attended schools that conducted a high number of transition activities involving children, their parents, and some communication with preschool staff. These children were also rated at school and at home as having less problem behaviours.

RELATIVE AGE

Relative age was found to impact on academic competence, with older children rated more academically competent than younger children. This supports the findings of other research and implies that relative age may predict adjustment to school as a measure of academic competence.

GENDER

Girls adjusted better to school than boys in terms of social skills and behaviour. Girls exhibited more social skills than boys, and boys had more problem behaviours, in terms of hyperactivity and externalising problems. These findings suggest that gender is predictive of adjustment to school as a measure of social skills, and as a measure of the absence of problem behaviours.

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE

Children's language impacted significantly with adjustment to school as a measure of social skills, behaviour, and academic competence. The study found that children who do not speak English at home have more difficulty adjusting to school than children who speak English alone or in combination with another language.

DIFFERENT PRESCHOOL TYPE SITUATIONS

Attendance at preschool type situations impacted on children's adjustment to school. Children attending preschool type situation for more than 12 hours a week, or attending centre-based childcare, demonstrated significantly more problem behaviours both at home and at school than other children. These findings suggest that children attending childcare services (or preschool services for more than 12 hours per week) have more difficulty adjusting to school in terms of problem behaviours than children who have attended kindergarten only.

A FAMILIAR PLAYMATE

The presence of a familiar playmate in the same class had a significant effect on children's adjustment to school. A child commencing school with a familiar playmate in the same class was more likely to exhibit appropriate social skills, behaviour, and academic competence. The results support the findings of Ladd and Price (1987) that pairing children with familiar peers when commencing the first year of school may promote early school adjustment, and also support the suggestion by Ladd (1990) that peer relationships and early school adjustment may be related.

It should be noted that having a familiar playmate in the same class compensates for deleterious factors related to gender, age, attendance at childcare, and speaking a language other than English at home, all of which place a child at risk of not adjusting well to the first year of school.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

It can be implied that transition programs with multiple opportunities for children and parents to familiarise themselves with the school environment and expectations have an effect on children's adjustment to school in reducing problem behaviours. Problem behaviours not only affect the individual child's adjustment to school, they can impact on teachers' acceptance of children, the classroom situation, and on other children. Schools should develop transition programs that provide children and parents with a variety of opportunities to become familiar with the new environment, and that involve collaboration with previous preschool situations.

The impact of attendance at long-day childcare on children's adjustment to school in terms of problem behaviours cannot be ignored. It is imperative that schools develop strategies for developing effective links with childcare centres and for including children who attend long-day childcare services, and their parents, in transition programs.

The presence of a familiar playmate can be seen as a strongly significant factor affecting children's adjustment to the first year of school. Attention to the importance of a familiar playmate in the same class should become a priority for all schools in mitigating the effects of factors increasing the likelihood of children not adjusting adequately to the first year of school. In response to this it is important that schools develop transition strategies for recognising friendships in allocating children to classes, and in encouraging the development of friendships for children who may commence school without a familiar playmate, especially children who move from childcare or from other regional areas. Given the arguments by Ladd and Price (1987) and Ladd (1990), it is important for these friendships to be fostered before children commence school and for children to maintain established friendships especially if moving into school without familiar playmates. In fact, having a familiar playmate in the same class should be the first priority in allocating children to prep classes.

IN SUMMARY

We need to remember that if the initial adjustment to school is satisfactory children are more likely to be successful in their future progress than children who have difficulty adjusting to the school situation.

Transition programs should be based on a philosophy that children's adjustment to school is easier when children are familiar with the new situation, parents are informed about the new school, and teachers have information about children's development and previous experiences.

In this way, effective transition programs should ensure the gradual preparation of children and parents; continuity of peers; continuity of expectations between settings, including teacher and child behaviours; continuity of programming for children's learning; ongoing communication between staff from school and previous situations, including childcare services.

NOTES

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For more details of the Adjustment to School Project see:

Margetts, K. (1994). *Children's adjustment to the first year of school.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Melbourne.

The opening quote about transition to school is from page 44 of:

Department of School Education. (1992). *The ministerial review of school-entry age in Victoria.* Victoria: Author.

For other research into effects of the transition from home to school see:

Cleave, S., Jowett, S. & Bate, M. (1982). *And so to school. A study of continuity from pre-school to infant school.* Great Britain: NFER-Nelson.

Howes, C. (1990). Can the age of entry into child care and the quality of child care predict adjustment in kindergarten? *Developmental Psychology, 26* (2), 292–303.

Ladd, J. M. & Price, J. M. (1987). Predicting children's social and school adjustment following the transition from preschool to kindergarten. *Child Development, 58*(5), 1168–1189.

Love, J. M., Logue, M. E., Trudeau, J. V., & Thayer, K. (1992). *Transition to kindergarten in American school. Final report of the National Transition Study.* Washington, DC: Office of Policy and Planning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 344693)

Thompson, B. (1975). Adjustment to school. *Educational Quarterly, 17* (2), 128–136.

Discontinuities associated with a move from a developmental approach to a cognitive one are noted by:

Cleave et al. (1982), *see* above.

Fowler, S. A. (1982). *Transition from preschool to kindergarten for children with special needs.* Kansas University Early Childhood Institute. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 151977)

Renwick, M. (1987). Transition to school: The children's experience. ***set:*** *Research Information for Teachers, 2* (item 12).

References to the discontinuities in peer groups include:

Fowler (1982), *see* above.

Ladd, G. (1990). Having friends, keeping friends, making friends, and being liked by peers in the classroom: Predictors of children's early school adjustment. *Child Development, 61* (4), 1081–1100.

Ladd & Price (1990), *see* above.

References for discontinuities in the involvement of parents include:

Cleave et al. (1982), *see* above.

Love et al. (1992), *see* above.

Previous studies which have provided qualitative measures of adjustment include:

Ladd & Price (1987), *see* above.

Love et al. (1992), *see* above.

Slee (1986), *see* above.

The quote about the need to study early school adjustment is from page 1081 of:

Ladd (1990), *see* above.

For details of the SSRS see:

Gresham, F. M. & Elliott, S. N. (1987). The relationship between adaptive behaviour and social skills: Issues in definition and assessment. *Journal of Special Education, 21*(9), 167–181.

The findings that peer relationships and early school adjustment may be related are also noted by:

Ladd (1990), *see* above.

Ladd & Price (1987), *see* above.

That problem behaviours affect more than just the child's adjustment to school is noted by:

Renwick (1987), *see* above.

That satisfactory initial adjustment leads to success in future progress is noted by:

Ladd & Price (1987), *see* above.

Thompson (1975), *see* above.

Further resources which may be useful for readers include:

Hill, J. (1991). *Ready, set, school: A guide to the primary school years.* Bacchus Marsh, VIC Australia: Author.

Renwick, M. (1997). *Starting school: A guide for parents and caregivers.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

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Further reading

Readers are directed to the following articles recently published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in ***set***: *Research Information for Teachers.*

set *Special 1997: Language and literacy*

Why Ernie Can't Read: Sesame Street *and literacy* by Barbara Fowles Mates and Linda Strommen (article 4).

Story-reading programme in a Tongan Language Group by Ema Wolfgramm, Stuart McNaughton, Villiami Afeaki (article 7).

set: *Research Information for Teachers, 1, 1995*

Beyond expectations — Using Calculators with Young Children by Susie Groves and Jill Cheeseman (item 3).

set: *Research Information for Teachers, 2, 1995*

Using CD-ROM Storybooks to Encourage Reading Development by Martyn Wild (item 5).

Road Safety Education for preschoolers — Learning or playing? by Joy Cullen (item 12).

Best of ***set***: *Families and School, 1994*

Children's Use of the Resources Families Provide by Gay Ochiltree and Paul Amato (item 2).

Poverty and Performance by Christine Wilson and Ann Dupuis (item 3).

What Joyce Learnt From Her Mother by Barbara Tizard (item 4).

Step-families by Ruth Webber (item 5).

Transition to School by Margery Renwick (item 6).

The Too Hard Basket? by Cathy Wylie (item 7).

Parents Teaching in Schools by Jacqueline McGilp (item 8).

Keeping Ourselves Safe by Freda Briggs (item 9).

Educational Strategies for Chronically Ill Students by Katherine Rowe and others (item 10).

Is More of the Same Better? by Dianna Kenny (item 11).

Family Violence: Its Effects on Children and Schools by John Church (item 12).

Pause Prompt Praise: Seventeen Years On by Ted Glynn (item 13).

Reading to Pre-schoolers: Models of Tutoring by Stuart McNaughton (item 14).

TV and Homework by Mallory Wober (item 15).

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